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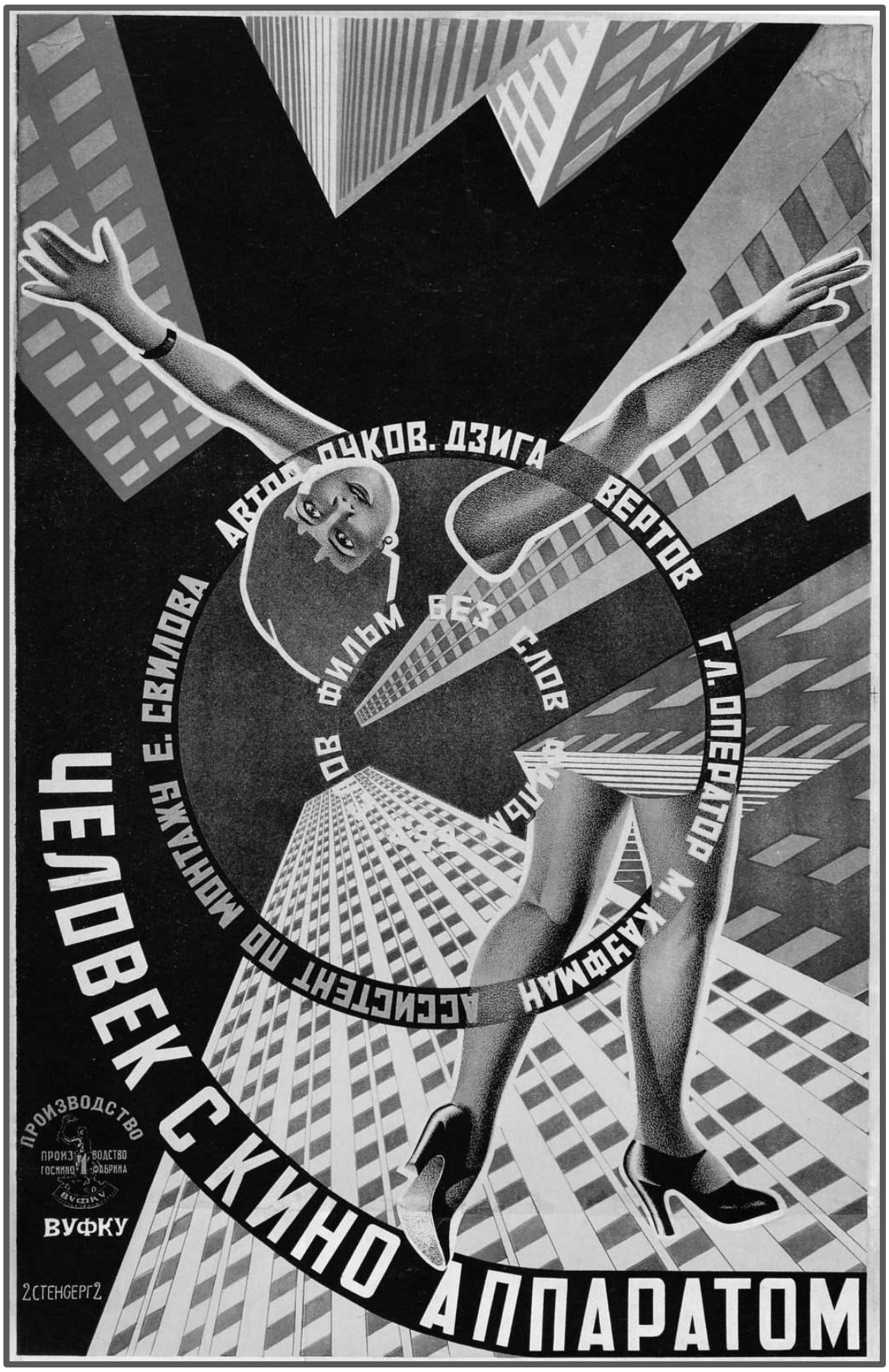
DIRECT ACTION



Womanhood... and other misfortunes

Silvia Federici
on the work of Sexuality

Michael Roberts
on the Next Recession

Christine Delphy
on Domestic Modes of Production

Direct Action is the monthly newsletter of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation, an organ of theory and practice.

On Sexuality as Work

Sexuality is the release we are given from the discipline of the work process. It is the necessary complement to the routine, regimentation of the work-week. It is a license to 'go mad,' to 'let go,' so that we can return more refreshed on Monday to our jobs.

'Saturday' is the irruption of the 'spontaneous,' the irrational in the rationality of the capitalist disciplining of our life. It is supposed to be the compensation for work and is ideologically sold as the 'other' from work, a field of freedom in which we can presumably be our true selves, have the possibility for intimate contacts in a universe of social relations where we are constantly forced to repress, defer, postpone, hide, even from ourselves, what we desire.

This being the promise, what we actually get is far from our expectations. As we cannot go back to nature by simply taking off our clothes, so cannot become 'ourselves' simply because it is love-making time. Little spontaneity is possible when the timing, conditions and the amount of energy available for love are out of our control. Not only after a week of work our bodies and feelings are numb and we cannot turn them on like a machine. But what comes out when we 'let go' is more often our repressed violence and frustration than our hidden self ready to be reborn in bed.

Among other things, we are always aware of the falseness of this spontaneity. No matter how much we scream, sigh, and how many erotic exercises we make in bed, we know that it is a parenthesis and that tomorrow we both will be back in our civilized clothes – we will have coffee together preparing to go to work. The more we know that it is a parenthesis which the rest of the day or the week will deny, the more difficult it becomes for us to turn into 'savages' at the socially sanctioned sex-time and forget everything else. We cannot avoid feeling ill at ease.

It is the same embarrassment we experience when we undress knowing that we will be making love, the embarrassment of the morning after, when we are already busy re-establishing distances; the embarrassment (finally) of pretending to be completely different from what we are during the rest of the day.

This transition is particularly painful for women; men seem to be experts at it, possibly because they have been subjected to a more strict regimentation in their work. Women have always wondered how it was possible that, after a nightly display of passion, he could get up already in a different world, so distant at times that it would be difficult for her to re-establish even a physical contact with him. In any case, it is always women who suffer most from the schizophrenic character of sexual relations, not only because we arrive at the end of the day with more work and more worries on our shoulders, but because we also have the responsibility of making the sexual experience pleasurable for the man. This is why women are usually less sexually responsive than men. Sex is work for us, it is a duty. The duty to please is so built into our sexuality that we have learned to get pleasure out of giving pleasure, out of getting men excited.

Since we are expected to provide a release, we inevitably become the object on which men discharge their repressed violence. We are raped, both in our beds and in the streets, precisely because we have been set up to be the providers of sexual satisfaction, the safety valves for everything that goes wrong, and men have always been allowed to turn their anger against us, if we do not measure up to the role, particularly when we refuse to perform.

Compartmentalization is only one aspect of the mutilation of our sexuality. The subordination of our sexuality to the reproduction of labor power has meant that heterosexuality has been imposed on us as the only acceptable sexual behavior. In reality, every genuine communication
has a sexual component, for our bodies and emotions are indivisible and we communicate at all levels all the time. Sexual contact with women is forbidden because

in bourgeois morality anything that is unproductive is obscene, unnatural, perverted. This has meant the imposition of a schizophrenic condition on us, as early in our lives we must learn to draw a line between the people we can love and the people we just talk to, those to whom we can open our body and those to whom we can only open our 'souls,' our friends and our lovers. The result is that we are bodiless souls for our female friends and soulless flesh for our male lovers. And this division separates us not only from other women but from ourselves as well, in the sense of what we do or do not accept in our bodies and feelings – the 'clean' parts that are there for open display, and the 'dirty,' 'secret' parts that can only be disclosed in the conjugal bed, at the point of production.

The same concern for production has demanded that sexuality, especially in women, be confined to certain periods of our lives. Sexuality is repressed in children and adolescent as well as in older women. Thus, the years in which we are allowed to be sexually active are the years in which we are most burdened with work, so that enjoying our sexual encounters becomes a feat. But the main reason why we cannot enjoy sex is that for women sex is work; giving pleasure is part of what is expected of every woman. Sexual freedom does not help.

Certainly it is important not to be stoned to death if we are 'unfaithful' or if it is found that we are not virgins. But sexual freedom means more work. In the past we were just expected to raise children. Now we are expected to have a waged job, still clean the house and have children and, at the end of a double work-day, be ready to hop in bed and be sexually enticing. And we must enjoy it as well, something which is not expected of most jobs for a bored performance would be an insult to male virility, which is why there have been so many investigations in recent years concerning which parts of our body – whether the vagina or the clitoris – are more sexually productive. But whether in its liberalized or more repressive form, our sexuality is still under control. The law, medicine and our economic dependence on men all guarantee that, although the rules are loosened, spontaneity is still impossible in our sexual life. Sexual repression in the family is a function of that control. In this sense fathers, brothers, husbands, pimps all act as agents of the state, supervising our sexual work, ensuring that we provide sexual services according to the established, socially sanctioned productivity norms.

Economic dependence is the ultimate means of control over our sexuality. This is why sexual work is still one of the main occupations for women and prostitution underlines every sexual encounter. Under these circumstances, there cannot be any spontaneity in sex for us nor can sexual pleasure be more than an ephemeral thing for us. Because of the exchange involved and the duty to give pleasure to men, sexuality for women is always accompanied by anxiety and it is the part of housework most responsible for self-hatred. In addition, the commercialization of the female body makes it impossible for us to feel comfortable with our body regardless of its shape or form. Few women can happily undress in front of a man knowing that they will be ranked according to highly publicized standards of beauty that everyone, male or female, is well aware of, as they are splashed all around us on every wall in our cities, and on every magazine or TV screen. Knowing that our looks we will judged and that in some way we are selling ourselves has destroyed our confidence and our pleasure in our bodies.

This is why, whether we are skinny or plump, long or short nosed, tall or small, we all hate our body. We hate it because we are accustomed to look at it from the outside, with the eyes of the men we meet, and with the bodies-market in mind. We hate it because we are used to think of it as something to sell, something that has become almost independent of us and that is always on a counter. We hate it because we know that so much depends on it. Depending on it, we can get a good or bad job (in marriage or work outside the home), we can gain a certain amount of social power, some company to escape the loneliness that awaits us in this society. And our body can turn against us, we may get fat, get wrinkles, age fast, make people indifferent to us, loose our right to intimacy, loose our chance to be touched or hugged.

In sum, we are too busy performing, too busy pleasing, too afraid of failing, to enjoy making love. The sense of our value is at stake in every sexual relation. It is always a great pleasure if a man says that we are good in bed, whether we have liked it or not; it boosts our sense of power, even if we know that afterwards we still have to do the dishes.

We are never allowed to forget the exchange involved, because we never transcend the value-relation in our love relation with a man. 'How much?' is the question that governs our experience of sexuality. Most of our sexual encounters are spent in calculations. We sigh, sob, gasp, pant, jump and down in bed, but in the meantime our mind keeps calculating 'how much': how much of ourselves we can give before we loose or undersell ourselves, how much will we get in return. If it is our first date, it is how much can we allow him to get: can he go up our skirt, open our blouse, put his fingers under our brassier? At what point should we tell him to

stop, how strongly should we refuse? How much can we tell him that we like him before he starts thinking that we are 'cheap'? Keep the price up, that's the rule, at least the one we are taught.

If we are already in bed the calculations become even more complicated, because we also have to calculate our chances of getting pregnant, so that, through the sighing and gasping and other shows of passion, we have to quickly run down the schedule of our period. Faking pleasure in the sexual act, in the absence of an orgasm, is extra work and a hard one, because when you are faking it you never know how far you should go, and you always end up doing more for fear of not doing enough. It has taken a lot of struggle and a leap in our collective social power to finally be able to admit that nothing was happening.

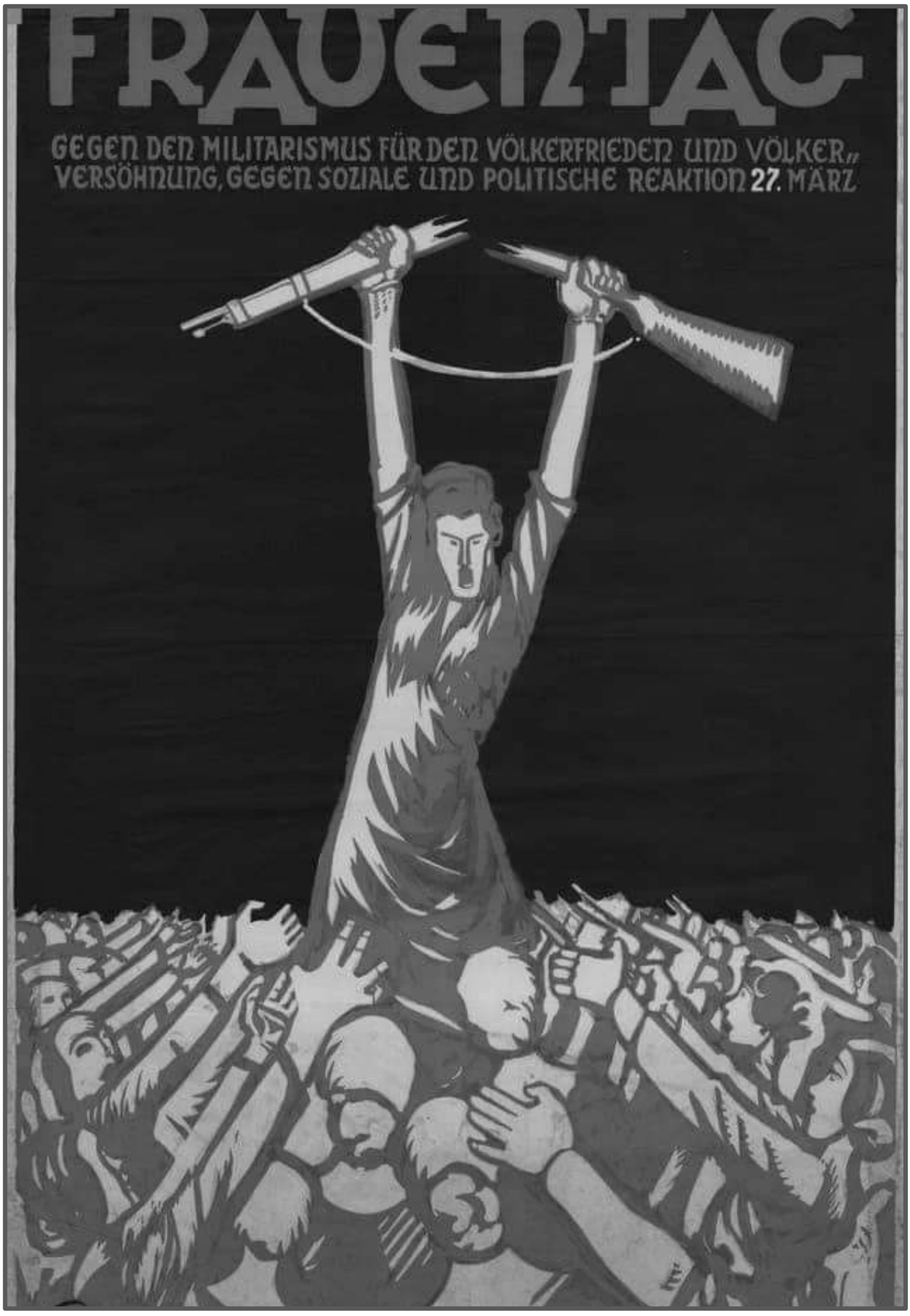
Silvia Federici, 1975

The Capitalist Law of the Conservation of Gendered Oppression

A common position among leftists of the 60s-80s was that Women's Liberation and Queer Liberation struggles are revolutionary struggles against capitalism. The argument went that capitalism needs to constantly reproduce itself on an extended scale, including an ever-expanding workforce, and it does this by pairing every adult male worker with a housewife, bonded to the home by domestic labour with very limited reproductive choices. If women were able to refuse marriage, motherhood and heterosexuality, they would do so en masse and cause a terminal crisis in social reproduction. This made struggles against gender oppression not just a moral necessity but an act of revolutionary sabotage. If capitalism cannot exist without gendered oppression, resistance to gendered oppression becomes a fulcrum by which capital can be toppled.

This line of argument has largely fallen out of favour: quietly shuffled into the background, dropped entirely by most 21st century leftists, or simply treated as a faintly embarrassing artefact of a more optimistic time. Any worthwhile leftist will (correctly) insist that queer and women's liberation have yet to be won and cannot be completed while capital still lives. Still, the conventional wisdom is that these struggles are long-since exhausted as a means of making inroads against capital. The predictions of their efficacy were refuted by history: the Second Wave facilitated a jailbreak from domestic servitude, motherhood, and housewifery, yet the terminal crisis never came. With every generation since more women walk away; birth rates have now fallen below replacement. How then, does capitalism seem stronger than ever?

Since we are expected to provide a release, we inevitably become the object on which men discharge their repressed violence. - **Federici, 1975**


FRAUENTAG
GEGEN DEN MILITARISMUS FÜR DEN VÖLKERFRIEDEN UND VÖLKER„
VERSÖHNUNG, GEGEN SOZIALE UND POLITISCHE REAKTION 27. MÄRZ

These causes have a moral weight that fully justifies them as sites of struggle in themselves but capitalism has completely metabolised these movements' demands and used them to manufacture consent for itself all the more effectively. Girlboss-inflected rainbow capitalism is everywhere. International corporations scramble over each other to show how many women are on their board or to superimpose the pride flag on their logos in June. These gestures are cynical but ultimately a reflection of the fact that queer and feminist politics have largely become hegemonic - a bittersweet success tainted by the realisation that these politics were never as revolutionary as was once hoped.

Or so the narrative goes.

This narrative is blinkered in the extreme and fails to look beyond the imperial core and semicore. It is a narrative based on an idealist conception of sexual politics disconnected from the interests that drive it. The case for liberation from gendered oppression, applied as a universal demand across borders, has never been more self-evidently revolutionary.

A Theory of Reproductive Imperialism

For decades now, the nations of the imperial core have been in the midst of a demographic collapse. Birth rates have fallen near-universally below the replacement rate. People are waiting longer and longer to have kids and when they do have kids they have fewer - to say nothing of those refusing all together. The Second Wave of Feminism, while badly incomplete and defeated on many of its more radical demands, successfully dismantled many of the instruments through which women have been coerced into unpaid reproductive labour. A woman with access to contraception, abortion on demand, no-fault divorce and a viable career is one who can refuse marriage and child-rearing. Given the option, many women have chosen to do just that. Adding to this, the increased normalisation of queer identities has further reduced the number of people who are willing to submit to uncompensated reproductive labour, both by intensifying scrutiny on gendered assumptions about what women are supposed to do and by expanding the proportion of relationships in which accidental conceptions are impossible.

A huge amount of the psychosexual madness of modern politics can be put down to the mass realisation by women that they do not need to submit themselves to a man in order to be happy. For a certain class of mediocre men who have been conditioned to expect a wife, the discovery that no woman will tolerate them without the threats of poverty, social ostracism and spinsterhood has driven them insane.

The flow of women into the workforce and the reduction in the number of children per household has massively boosted the absolute and relative rates of surplus value in the imperial core. As Marxists we know that wages are determined by the average cost of reproducing a worker at a certain standard of living, determined by historical factors and class struggle. When the social norm was for single breadwinner households with many children, full-time wages were set to cover the cost of supporting two adults and several children. When the norm became almost all adults working full-time jobs with a below-replacement birth rate, full-time wages fell to the cost of supporting one adult and a fractional child.

As women increasingly refused the reproductive labour required to maintain society, a rift opened up. Unpaid labour-hours are the raw material of profit and profit must grow endlessly for capital to live; the next generation of workers being smaller than the last is an existential threat to capital. However, international capital has found a means to work around this problem.

In recent decades, the insufficient replenishment of native-born workers has been supplemented by a flow of workers migrating from the periphery. These have largely been split into two groups: manual labourers to do agricultural and app-based gig work and highly skilled professionals to fill the ranks of doctors, lawyers, engineers, and other highly-educated roles.

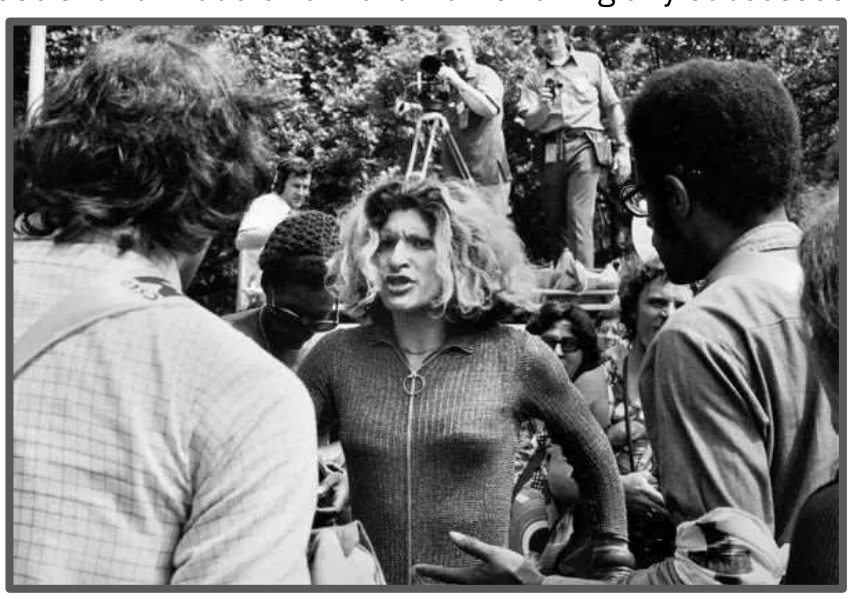
The benefit of such migration to the imperial core is obvious: these are workers who arrive ready-made with all the costs of their upbringing and education already paid, and by the nature of the risks and challenges involved they are self-selected to be more ambitious and disciplined than the average worker. Their precarious legal status (and nativist rhetoric about the suspicious Other) means they can be subjected to intensities of labour discipline that native workers would refuse. Furthermore,

they are usually without savings or legal entitlement to welfare benefits that might give them the ability to refuse poor working conditions. Some portion of them who clear every hurdle can be granted citizenship and all that entails, while the rest can be deported back as soon as they cease to be useful.

So far, so familiar. This is a well-documented phenomenon by which rates of relative and absolute surplus have been maintained in the core. However, western leftists' analysis often stops there and fails to consider the implications: the states of the periphery also require a constantly growing workforce for all the same reasons listed above. Yet, due to the aforementioned migration, they are also compelled to bear a significant portion of the reproductive costs of the imperial core. Under the intense conditions of interstate competition to lower taxes and labour standards, combined with the low rates of profit per worker characteristic of labour-intensive industries, such states have very little ability to subsidise social reproduction in the ways the states of the core and semicore do. The imperial core and semicore may directly subsidise through welfare tax breaks and public schooling, or indirectly through mandated maternity/paternity leave - the periphery cannot.

The survival of the social order requires enormous volumes of reproductive work to be done, but neither capital nor the state will pay for it. The only solution available is that women must be forced to bear the costs of raising large numbers of children, uncompensated. This is only possible by the complete destruction of whatever reproductive rights they may previously have had, along with the destruction of their civil rights, and public campaigns of terror against those who are perceived to have shirked these duties by abortion, birth control, homosexuality, or other deviances.

This analysis demystifies the broad failure of queer and feminist campaigns to secure even minimal liberal demands in much of the global south (and the rise of fascist and theocratic movements rolling any successes back) without idealist - and racist - condescention about the mental and cultural backwardness of the populations. Sexual counterrevolution in the periphery happens because of, not despite, the relative freedoms in the core.



Under capitalism, every queer childless polycule in the core is subsidised by the coerced servitude of a tradwife in the periphery.

Seen in this light, the rainbow capitalism of the imperial core takes on a distinctly more sinister tone - rather than a token acknowledgement of hard-won rights, it becomes a victory lap of international capital, having recuperated yet another liberation struggle into a vector of intensified exploitation.

But if international capital has taken the side of women and queers against patriarchy within the core, why are the patriarchs still able to put up a fight and even roll back hard-won freedoms? What (other than an organised, militant proletariat) could possibly stand at war with international capital?

Culture wars as Intra-Capitalist Civil War

Within the countries of the imperial core where class consciousness is at an historically low ebb, electoral politics represents little more than a dramatisation of power struggles between different sectors of capital. Typically, the more "conservative" party represents the interests of small business and the more rural, geographically-fixed, extractive forms of large capital (e.g. agribusiness, mining, forestry, etc.) and the more "progressive" party represents the interests of large international capital (finance, tech, etc) as well as the sections of capital more directly dependant on local ecologies (e.g. tourism). This can explain most of the spectacle of electoral politics quite neatly - fights over environmental policy, education, infrastructure, and the like are little more than contests for power where the sectional interests of capital are at odds. Yet at first glance it seems to totally fail to explain culture war as a phenomenon.

It's not immediately obvious why sections of capital would concern themselves with defending racist statues in public squares, limiting reproductive options, or passing laws to persecute trans people. The easiest response is that it's a distraction - a vast, pointless spectacle of cruelty against the marginalised, in which the energy of politically engaged people invested in

liberatory politics can be harmlessly discharged far from the issues that capital actually cares about. All the while providing a legitimising illusion of democratic efficacy. While there is an element of truth here, it's an inadequate view that cannot explain the specifics and intensity of culture war politics.

Examples from North America spring to mind: people whipped up into a fury by the supposedly epiphenomenal spectacle have orchestrated widespread boycotts of major corporations and entire states, intentionally intensified and extended a devastating pandemic, performed quixotic attempts at insurrection, and successfully pulled off extended blockages of vital commercial arteries which further exacerbated an extant global logistical crisis. All of this for no apparent end beyond spite. When these activities directly and significantly impede the activities of capital as they increasingly do, we need a structural explanation that not only explains the cause of culture war, but also why it is tolerated.

If the expansion of bourgoise rights to women and queer people in the core has been such a boon to capital, why would there be such a concerted, well-funded campaign to roll it back? As I write this, there is an orgiastic carnival of cruelty sweeping the state governments of the US attempting to repeal every gain made by women and queer people in the last 60 years, including ones that seemed settled (like the legality of same-sex marriage and the prohibition on adults marrying children). *Note: since this was written in early April, the repeal of Roe v Wade has opened vastly more possibilities for state violence against women, the scope of which is still unknown. I believe this implicit declaration of a judicial counterrevolution has only made the analysis of this piece more urgent and relevant.*

As stated above, international capital has found the partial dissolution of traditional patriarchal structures in core and semi-core countries to be convenient - it has created a higher rate of labour force participation and reduced wages per worker. International (read also: highly financialised) capital's power is exerted primarily through the market: they will lobby for changes in law that benefit them, but it's typically through legislation that will further streamline and lubricate their cycle of M-C-M'. They need no other source of authority than their purchasing power (which gives them vast capacity to command labour and resources) and their low per-unit costs of producing demanded commodities. International capital is a purer, more mature form of capital, functioning on its own terms for its own purposes and answerable to no human need. As its power is exerted primarily through the market, it is in its interest to see the dissolution of all other power structures and the expansion of market logic into every aspect of life. This international capital is the motive force behind neoliberalism and all that entails.

Small and geographically fixed capital is instantiated within a more mixed ecosystem of power in which capital cannot operate independent of the person of the capitalist. The power of the capitalist in this world is not primarily exercised through his ownership of capital, but through a symbiotic web of parochial institutions of ideological and repressive power. His (almost always his) status as local entrepreneur is intertwined with his roles as member of an influential local family, as respected churchgoer granted the podium to channel god for his own purposes, as political figure elected to decision-making positions within the community, as a nexus of contacts who always knows a guy. These forms of power are not only essential to shaping political decisions in ways that aid him in accumulation, but grant the status of a trusted authority who can stretch the tolerance of workers, residents and governments well beyond what is possible for impersonal international capital. Here he can convince workers that they are family and they should sacrifice in his interest, he is the most trusted voice in every dispute, he can bend the ear of a family of abused employees, of law enforcement, of the judiciary, of local governments to make excuses and exceptions and understandings in his favour and always come off as the magnanimous pillar of the community. This is the power of the highest tier of the local petty bourgeoisie: the so-called "Gentry".

Fundamentally, property has a different meaning to the Gentry and other petty bourgeois than it does to the haute bourgeoisie - for the haute bourgeoisie property exists purely as capital, the means for accumulation. Its role is to act as an income stream and that income can purchase whatever goods or status one wishes. For the petty bourgeoisie, property is power and authority - it is the space in which you can act as absolute dictator and it is your status within your community. The exercise of this discretionary power necessarily requires deviations from the optimal choice of accumulation but this is worthwhile in pursuit of a larger set of personal goals. This is, for example, why anti-discrimination laws are such a point of friction - they restrict the power of the petty bourgeois over their domain by binding them to the logic of the profit-maximising agent that finance capital wishes everyone to be.

This power-ecology in which the Gentry thrive is

structured by specific sets of social institutions and customs, constantly threatened by the logic of financial capital in its drive to mediate every interaction through market logic and dissolve all that is solid into air. In response, the Gentry fight a constant defensive war to preserve the networks in which their power is instantiated.

The Gentry typically requires the overwhelming majority of social reproduction in their domain to be done locally within the institutions they control. This requires strong patriarchal authority enforced consistently on many fronts to foreclose life choices that don't include a nuclear family with at least 3 kids. There must be constant and ongoing social, legal, economic and logistical friction to make abortion, contraception, divorce, and queerness anywhere between difficult and unthinkable, as all of these undermine social reproduction.

Their authority also requires that travel in and out be limited and controlled by these non-market institutions of social life. It would be disastrous if any more than a small proportion of

young adults leave for the city, as this would mean the Gentry losing out on the benefits of the labour power of workers whose reproduction costs have already been borne locally. It is important that those who leave do not undermine the legitimacy of the local social order: in every case the situation must either be framed as Local Boy Made Good in the Big City, or a sinner cast out from Eden. The former re-enforces the local order ideologically by affirming the superiority of people who grow up with their values, and economically through the pressure to bring their money back into the community via remittances or returning later in life (so long as they don't bring back too many of the wrong ideas). The latter re-enforces the social order by intensifying the terror of corrupting outside influences and justifies more intensive crackdowns on any deviation or rebellion against these institutions.

Another survival mechanism by the Gentry is ensuring that people who enter the community from outside are required to say certain shibboleths, pledge loyalty to certain institutions, and demonstrate that they are no threat to the ideological status quo.

At their core, the Gentry requires hostility to attempted entrances by corporate capital, primarily by appealing to the idea that they will undermine these beloved "community values", that they are impersonal and cruel, and above all that they are a trojan horse for socially progressive politics. When performative anti-corporate furies are whipped up over a company turning their logo rainbow-coloured in June or making some statement about racial injustice, this is almost always the driving motive behind it. If you believe corporate capital is an infiltrator trying to make your kids trans, you'll boycott them in favour of the local small business who otherwise couldn't compete.

Against "Polycules in One Country"

As is so common for liberation struggles under capitalism, women's and queer liberation is a revolution only half-done. Its victories are real, worth defending and currently under threat. That said, we must not be blind to the reality that in defending basic bourgeois rights of women and queer people in the imperial core (and in acting to make them a reality in areas of the imperial core where they are suppressed by the hegemony of the Gentry) we are necessarily having the secondary effect of acting as insurgents for international finance capital against the bastions of small capital.

We should have no sympathy for the small capitalist, appeals to the moral superiority of the small local capitalist to the faceless corporate monolith have always been the romantic fantasies of sycophants. The petty bourgeoisie has historically always been the social base of fascism and it is playing out that role prodigiously in this current wave of reaction, their proletarianisation is an unambiguous good. Large monopoly capital has historically been easier to unionise against, easier to fight and squeeze concessions from, and ultimately is likely to be easier to expropriate and repurpose for a planned economy beyond the value form.

Nonetheless, having J. P. Morgan as a fellow traveller is grounds for some serious soul-searching, and every conscience should be troubled by the thought that one's own sexual freedom is bought with the intensified sexual servitude of others. This brings us back to our original question: are women's and queer liberation struggles revolutionary in the 21st century?

From the above analysis I think the answer is definitive yes, but only when applied to the imperial periphery. Winning the practical freedom to refuse social reproductive labour at every level without fear of violence or penalty (legal, economic or social) across the majority of the globe would go beyond its manifest liberatory content and induce a rupture in capitalism as an international system. This redoubles the importance of these demands as not just liberatory but revolutionary.

The means by which such a victory could be achieved are beyond the scope of this essay, but a few comments on this are in order. Such struggles must take seriously the differing cultural, historical and economic contours of gendered oppression in different populations and be vigilant against the tendency to simply universalise the experience and assumptions of western feminism. International solidarity in these struggles and tight coordination of strategy across borders in pursuit of these interests must be features of any serious revolutionary movement against capitalism, and organising women against reproductive labour is among the prime tasks of any communist party in the global periphery.

The struggle against gendered oppression is of immense importance, so immense that to say it is the project to liberate billions from lives of reproductive servitude is an understatement. The global victory of women and queer people over our oppressors is the victory of all humanity over the abstractions which enslave us and a precondition for humankind to finally take conscious control of its own destiny.

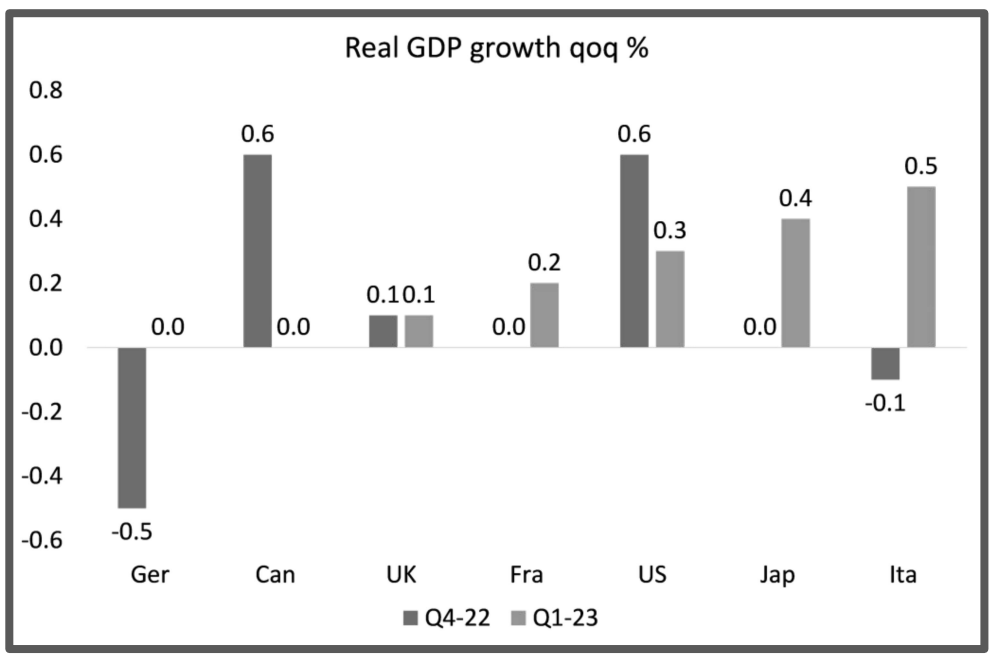
Comrade Cassie Barnes

G7: Where is that recession?

The G7 leaders meet this weekend in Hiroshima, Japan, the site of the first atomic bomb holocaust dropped by American bombers on the city in August 1945, leading to the deaths of at least 100,000 citizens. But the G7 leaders' main deliberations will not be about that, but instead on how to 'contain' China and 'protect' Taiwan from Chinese 'aggression' through further militarization of the island as a thorn in the side of Chinese leaders. It's a form of what the British police call 'kettling', namely to surround and contain demonstrators in public protests. It is no accident that, with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is now expanding its role into Asia, that Ukrainian leader Zelensky has been invited to address the G7 leaders. As a counter, the Chinese are holding a conference of central Asian states in Xian. Such are the machinations of the intensifying geo-political conflict.

But this blog deals with economics and the G7 meeting is an opportunity to consider the state of world economy five months into 2023. My post last December on the economic prospects for 2023 was entitled "the impending slump". And I said that "Never has an impending recession been so widely expected. Maybe that means it won't happen – given the record of mainstream economic forecasters! But this time the consensus looks set to be right."
Well, five months in and there has been no slump – at least, not by the very crude definition of mainstream economics of a 'technical' recession, where an economy's real GDP contracts for two successive quarters. Several G7 economies have been pretty close to meeting that criterion of a slump: Germany and Italy recorded a contraction in Q4-22; Germany and Canada stagnated in Q1-23 and the UK barely grew in both quarters. France was not much better and the US, the best performing G7 economy, halved its growth rate in Q1-23.

The US National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) is the body usually referenced to decide whether there is a slump in the US – its criterion covers many more economic indicators. Here is how the NBER defines it:



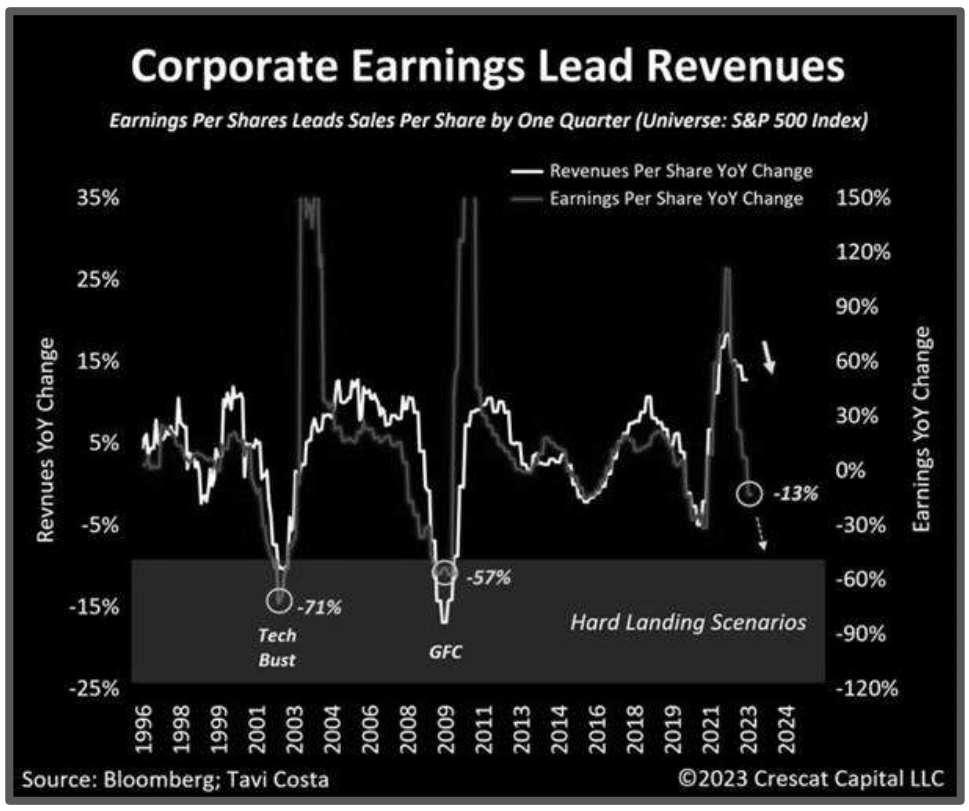
> *"Because a recession must influence the economy broadly and not be confined to one sector, the committee emphasizes economy-wide measures of economic activity. The determination of the months of peaks and troughs is based on a range of monthly measures of aggregate real economic activity published by the federal statistical agencies. These include real personal income less transfers, nonfarm payroll employment, employment as measured by the household survey, real personal consumption expenditures, wholesale-retail sales adjusted for price changes, and industrial production. There is no fixed rule about what measures contribute information to the process or how they are weighted in our decisions. In recent decades, the two measures we have put the most weight on are real personal income less transfers and nonfarm payroll employment."*

So the NBER's definition of a slump is more judgement than a rigid set of indicators. Most important of those is whether real personal incomes are rising or falling and whether employment is rising or falling. In the last two quarters, US real personal income rose 0.2% in Q4-22 and just 0.05% in Q1-23 (that is basically flat). So no contraction there yet, but slowing nearly to a halt.

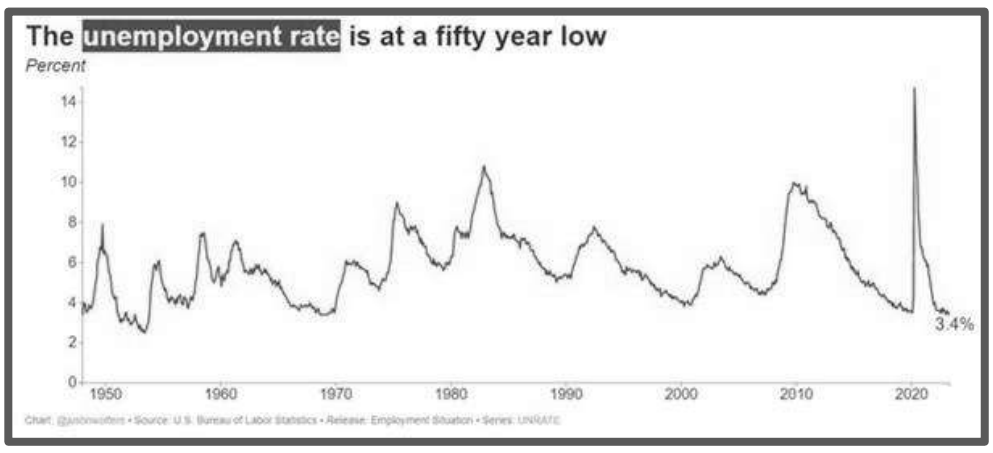
As for employment, although slowing in growth through much of 2022, employment rose by 0.6% in Q4-22 and at the same pace in Q1-23. Indeed, much is made of the low unemployment rates in the US and the rest of the G7. In the US, the rate is at a 50-year low. And it's the same story in the other G7 economies, if at different levels.

However, both these key NBER indicators are lagging indicators of a slump. They are confirmations of a slump already in progress. Rising unemployment and falling incomes only happen when a slump is underway, which is why the NBER uses them. But these indicators are no guide to whether there is "an impending slump". Under capitalist production, if companies are reducing investment and laying off their workforce and so reducing the overall wage bill, sales revenues will have been falling and profits declining well before that. So we must look elsewhere for leading indicators.

Marxist economic theory suggests that slumps will happen when the profitability of capital starts falling; eventually leading to a fall in total profits in an economy. Those profits can further be squeezed by increases in the cost of capital i.e interest costs on borrowing.



And on these criteria, the signs are rising of an impending slump. US corporate profits are suffering the biggest downturn in seven years. With the Q1-23 corporate earnings season over, the profits of S&P 500 companies are estimated to have dropped 3.7% on average compared to a year ago. This is the second straight quarter of earnings declines and



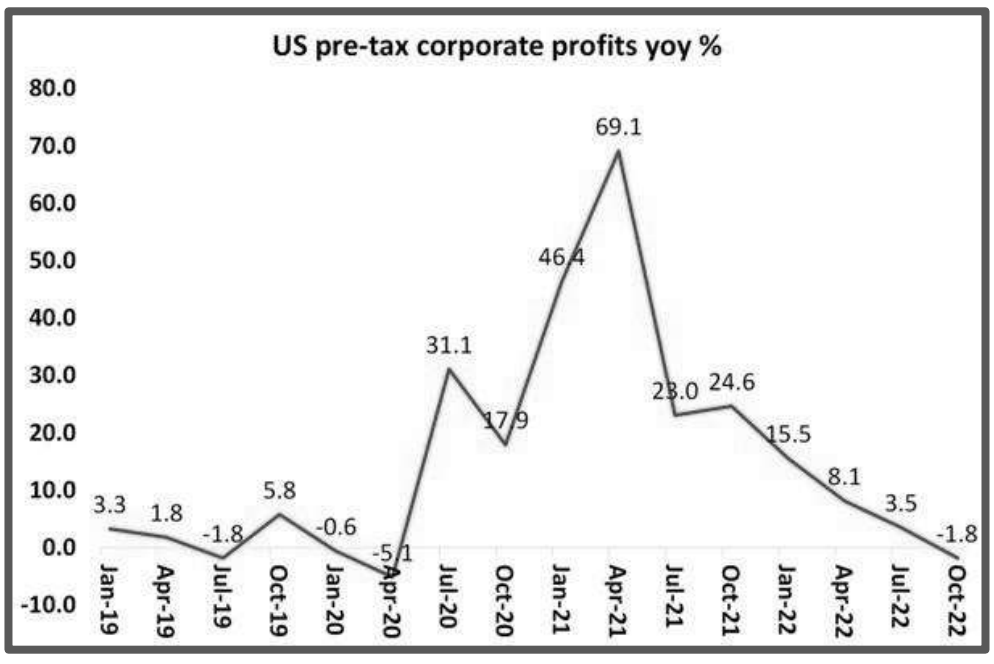
forecasts for the current Q2-23 that we are now in is for a further fall of 7.3%, with no better in Q3-23. This suggests a longer profit recession than during the pandemic. An earnings drop of more than three quarters was last seen in 2015-16, when the Federal Reserve started its last interest-rate hiking cycle.

According to historical data, changes in earnings tend to precede changes in sales revenue by approximately one quarter. As corporate earnings have fallen 13% in the last two quarters, we can expect sales revenues to follow.

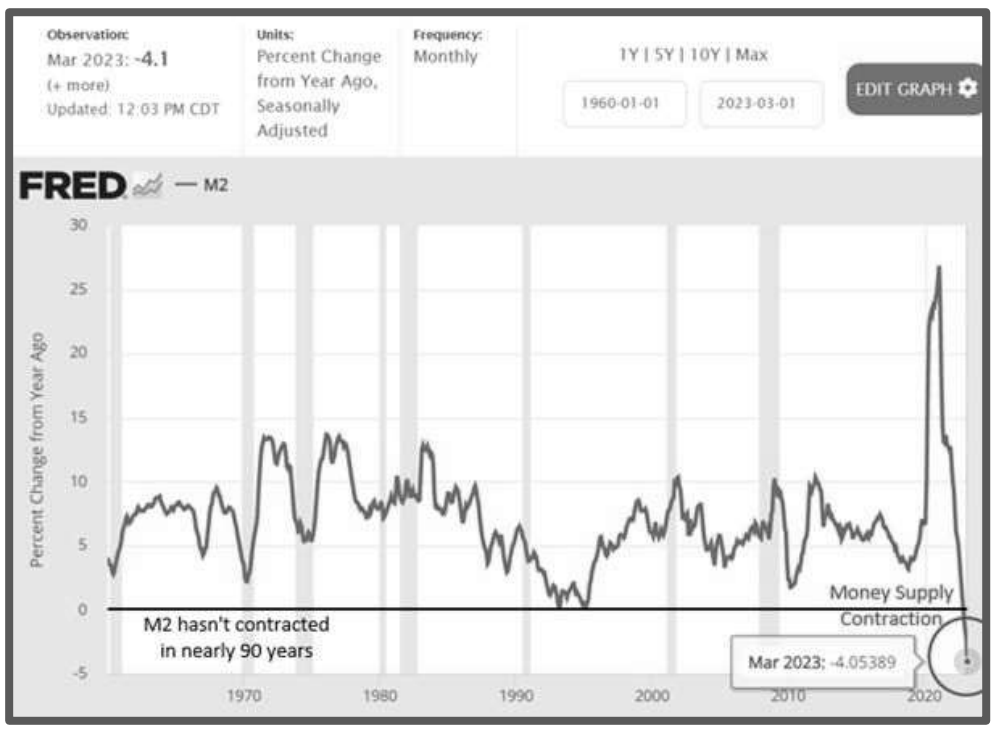
The corporate profit drop is not confined to the US. In Europe, estimates for corporate earnings are for a fall of 2.5% yoy in Q1-23, 5.4% in Q2-23 and 7.4% in Q3-23.

In previous posts I have pointed out that all the recent talk (understandable) of record high corporate profits and the hiking of margins as the main cause of rising inflation is now out of date. If the current cost of living crisis starting in 2022 was caused by 'greedflation', as some argue, it won't be the case during 2023.

Profit margins (profit per unit of production), having reached historic highs last year, are falling back and total corporate profits are now going south. In Q4-22 non-financial corporate profits fell 5.4%.



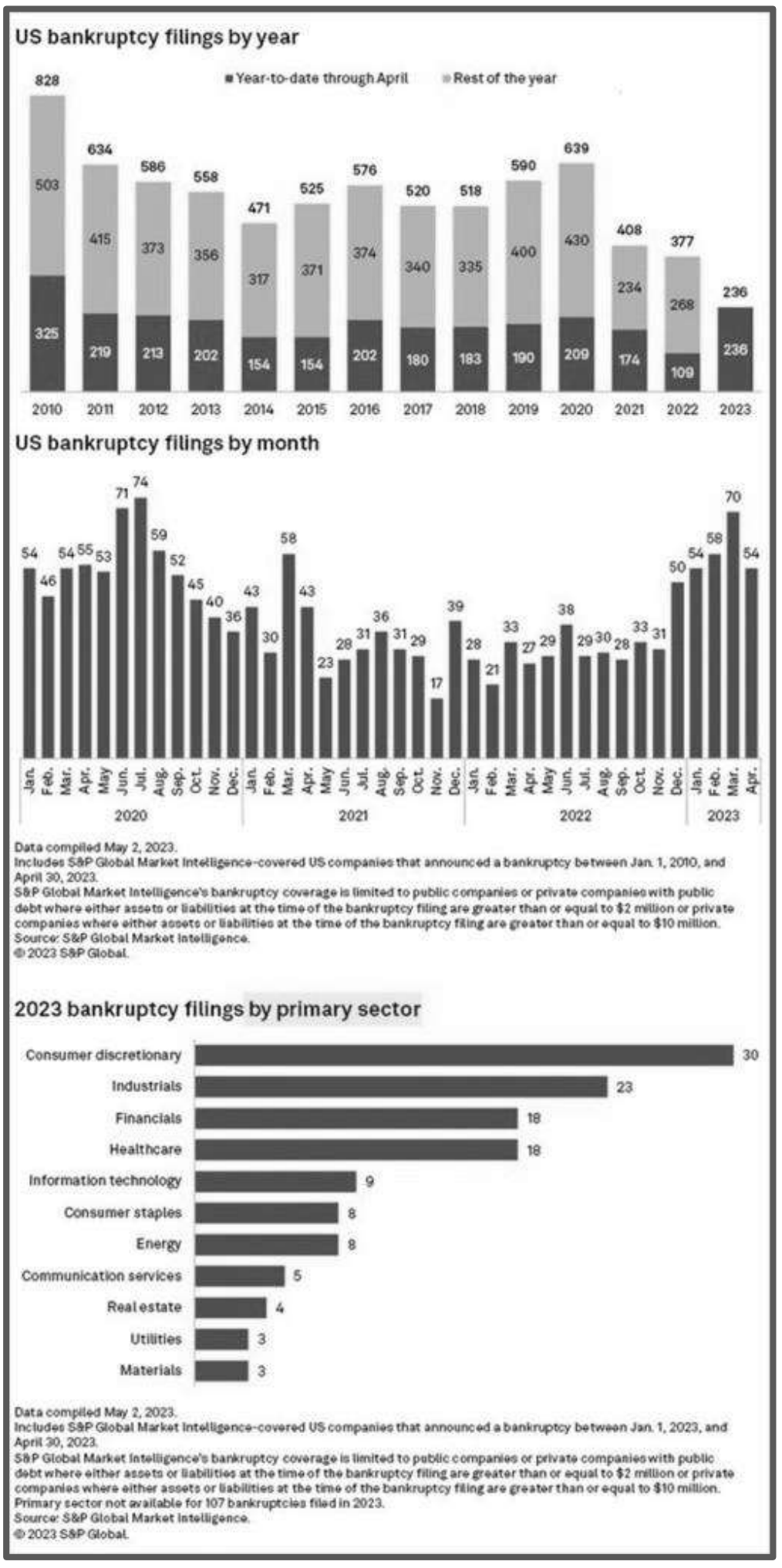
Then there is the rising cost of borrowing to fund production and investment as the Fed and other central banks hike interest rates and tighten credit at an unprecedented pace, supposedly to 'control' inflation in prices. US money supply is contracting for the first time in 90 years.



The result of these interest-rate rises has been a smouldering banking crisis in the US and Europe, as smaller and weaker banks become insolvent because the value of their assets in bonds have dropped sharply and depositors have fled to better yielding institutions or because companies and households need to spend their savings to meet rising bills.

Higher funding costs for banks will squeeze profits. Economists at Goldman Sachs estimate every 10% decline in bank profitability reduces lending by 2%. If the share of Fed interest-rate changes that are passed on to bank deposit rates, sometimes called “deposit betas,” reach levels seen in 2007—the last time the Fed raised rates close to current levels—that could lead to a 3-6% decline in lending in the US. Goldman expects that could reduce economic output by 0.3-0.5 percentage points this year, pushing the economy into recession.

That’s the banks. Behind them is the growing crisis in non-financial companies. Since 2000, non-financial corporate debt across America and Europe has grown from $12.7trn to $38.1trn, rising from 68% to 90% of their combined GDP. The rising costs of servicing this debt is pushing the weaker corporate ‘zombies’ and ‘fallen angels’ into bankruptcy.


US bankruptcy filings by year
Year-to-date through April
Rest of the year
2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
US bankruptcy filings by month
2020 2021 2022 2023
Data compiled May 2, 2023.
Includes S&P Global Market Intelligence-covered US companies that announced a bankruptcy between Jan. 1, 2010, and April 30, 2023.
S&P Global Market Intelligence's bankruptcy coverage is limited to public companies or private companies with public debt where either assets or liabilities at the time of the bankruptcy filing are greater than or equal to $2 million or private companies where either assets or liabilities at the time of the bankruptcy filing are greater than or equal to $10 million.
Source: S&P Global Market Intelligence.
© 2023 S&P Global.
2023 bankruptcy filings by primary sector
Consumer discretionary 30
Industrials 23
Financials 18
Healthcare 18
Information technology 9
Consumer staples 8
Energy 8
Communication services 5
Real estate 4
Utilities 3
Materials 3
Data compiled May 2, 2023.
Includes S&P Global Market Intelligence-covered US companies that announced a bankruptcy between Jan. 1, 2023, and April 30, 2023.
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Primary sector not available for 107 bankruptcies filed in 2023.
Source: S&P Global Market Intelligence.
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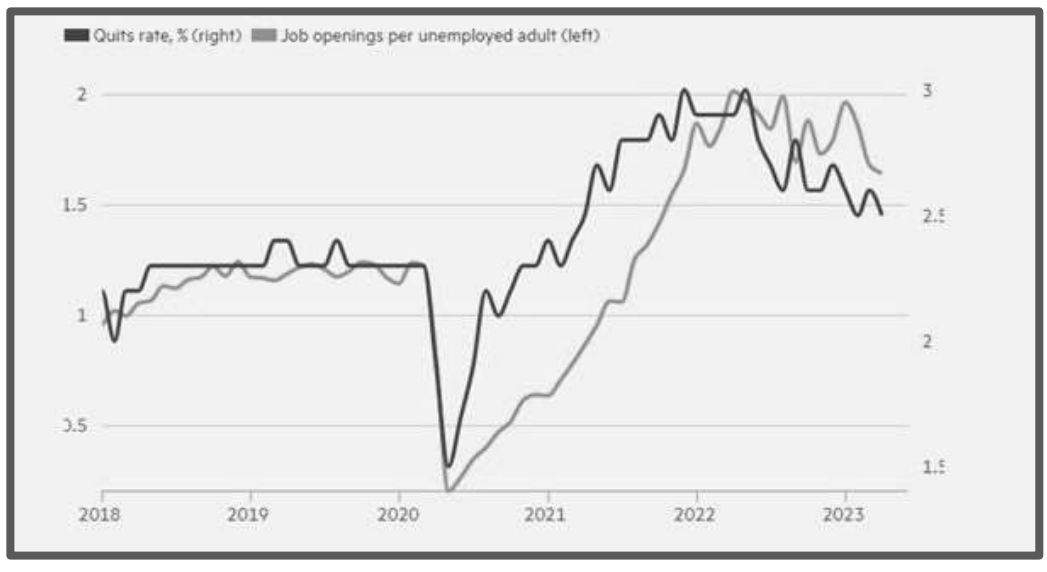
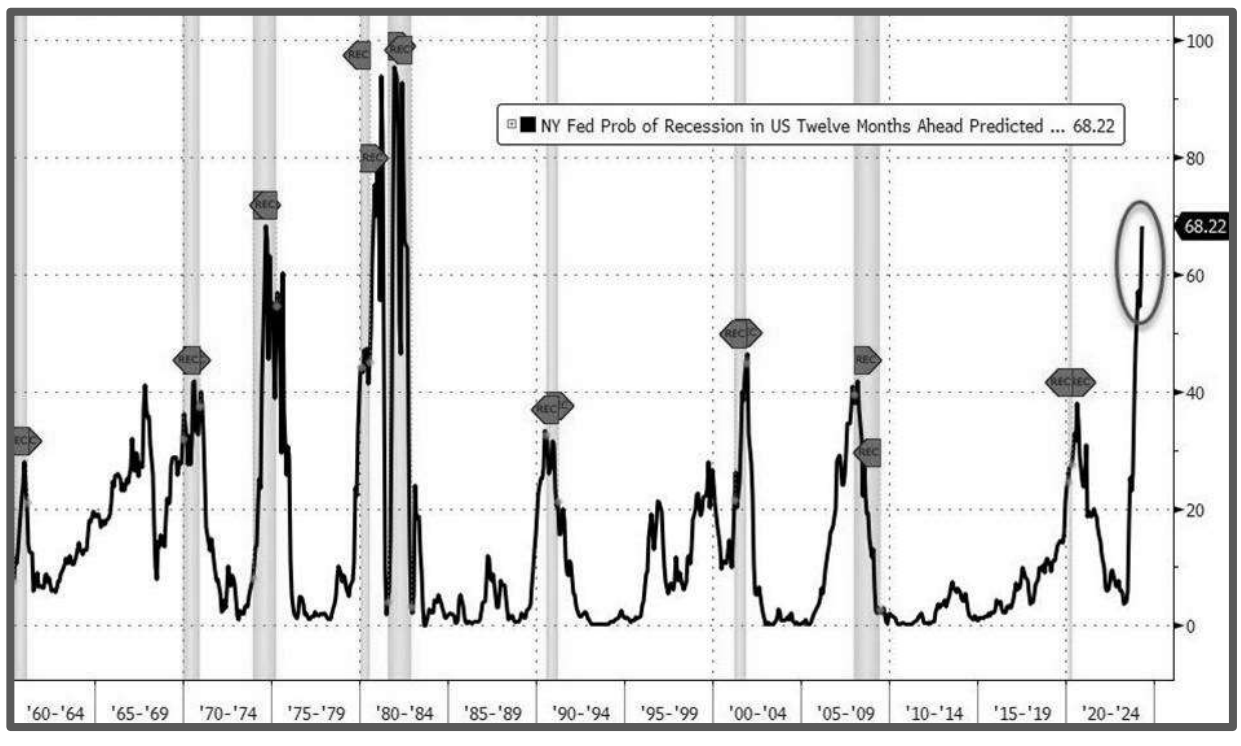
Whether the major economies go into an outright slump in 2023 is a moot point. Economic growth will be feeble at best, while 'sticky' inflation rates reduce real wage growth to very low rates (or into continued falls). In the US, the average decline in real wages was just over 2% year-on-year in the third quarter of 2022. In Europe, Germany and Spain saw even more pronounced declines in purchasing power, with real incomes falling by just over 4% and 5% respectively. Real wages in the Eurozone have fallen by 8% since the end of the pandemic slump in 2020. In Germany, real earnings have plunged by 5.7% in the last year, the largest real wage loss since statistics began.

And there are signs too that the 'hot' labour market is cooling. The post-Covid expansion of jobs (if mainly low paid and part-time) saw high vacancy and quit rates in the US. They are now dropping, if still above pre-pandemic levels.



The odds that the US will fall into a recession at some point over the next 12 months have risen to a 40-year high, according to a probability model from the New York Federal Reserve. The probability that the country will enter a recession within the next year has risen to 68.2 percent, which is the highest level since 1982. Indeed, the Fed's recession risk indicator is now greater than it was in November 2007, not long before the subprime crisis, when it stood at 40 percent.



What won't be discussed at the G7 meeting this weekend is the accelerating debt and currency crises in the Global South. I have reported on this before and will return to the issue in another post. But that debt disaster will ensure that any slump in the G7 economies will spread quickly to the rest of the world.

Michael Roberts

Patriarchy, Domestic Modes of Production, Gender and Class

The analysis of patriarchy in our society that I have been developing for the last fifteen years has a history I would like to detail. I came to my use of the concept and to the model growing out of it by way of two projects whose theoretical concerns might seem unrelated. One project was to study the transmission of family property (patrimony), and the other was to reply to criticisms of the women's liberation movement that come from the Left.

As it happened, when I started to do research on these two topics, I found that lack of relatedness was only apparent. This might have been predictable from the coherent commitment that had led me to these topics: I had wanted to work "on women," which is to say, for me, on women's oppression. Yet my director of studies at the time told me this was not possible, so I chose to study the inheritance of property instead, eventually to get back to my initial interest by an indirect route. In my research I first discovered what a great quantity of goods change hands without passing through the market; instead, these goods were passed through the family, as gifts or "inheritance." I also discovered that the science of economics, which purports to concern itself with everything related to the exchange of goods in society, is in fact concerned with only one of the of systems of production, circulation, and consumption of goods: the market.

At the time (between 1968 and 1970) I was also participating in the activities of one of the two groups that historically helped create the new feminist movement in France. I was very annoyed – and I was not alone, though like the hero of Catch 22 I thought I was being personally got at! – by one of the men in this mixed group. He claimed that the oppression of women could not be as severe or as important as the oppression of the proletariat because although women were oppressed, they were not "exploited."

I was well aware that something was wrong with his position. In that group, at least, we recognized that women earned half as much as men and worked twice as hard, but apparently women's oppression nevertheless had, in theory, no economic dimension! While we knew at

the time that housework existed, we saw it principally as a question of an unfair division of boring tasks; and since we did not ask the relevant questions about the problem, not surprisingly we got no relevant answers. However my work on patrimony – that is, on the economic aspects of the nonmarket sphere; or, to put it another way, on the nonmarket sphere of the economy – served to help me find and pose certain of these questions. Others, at the time, were also discovering the theoretical as well as the practical importance of housework, but they came to it by different routes and therefore arrived at rather different conclusions.

Analysis of gifts and the inheritance of property within the family allowed me to demystify the market. This prevented my getting caught in the classic trap of opposing exchange value and use value, an opposition that had led the pioneers (Benston and Larguia), as well as those who came later, into a number of impasses, or, if you will, into a circular route from which they could find no way out. By showing that this opposition only makes sense if one adopts the viewpoint of the market, I was able to propose a theory in which non-market value,

instead of being a problem in understanding housework, is one of the clues to elucidating the specific nature of housework. By taking this non-value as a constitutive element of housework I was able to show that (a) housework's exclusion from the market was the cause, and not the consequence, of its not being paid for; (b) this exclusion involved not only housework, nor only particular types of work, but rather social actors as well, or, to be more precise, work done within certain social relations; and (c) in seeking to understand housework, it is a mistake to see it merely as a particular set of tasks, whether one is seeking to describe them or to explain them in terms of their "intrinsic usefulness." I have taken up all these points again in my recent work, but they were present, at least in germ, in "The Main Enemy." From this time on I have been able to propose a theoretical rather than an empirical analysis of housework, which I see as a particular part of the much larger category of "domestic work," thanks to my initial creation of the concept of the "domestic mode of production."

Since 1970 I have also used the term "patriarchy," and in all my work I have tried to specify and delimit this word and to state precisely the relations between patriarchy and the domestic mode of production. I am still working on this. If I have used a fairly vague term, it has been so as to show from the start that I consider the oppression of women to be a system. But the question is, what are the system's components and how is it constituted? The notion has to be fined in, and this can only be done bit by bit.

I have, however, since entering the field, restricted the meaning I attach to the term "patriarchy." For many, it is synonymous with "the subordination of women." It carries this meaning for me, too, but with this qualification: I add the words "here and now." This makes a big difference. When I hear it said, as I often do, that "patriarchy has changed between the stone age and the present," I know that it is not "my" patriarchy that is being talked about. What I study is not an ahistoric concept that has wandered down through the centuries but something peculiar to contemporary industrial societies. I do not believe in the theory of survivals – and here I am in agreement with other Marxists. An institution that exists today cannot be explained by the fact that it existed in the past, even if this past is recent. I do not deny that certain elements of patriarchy today resemble elements of the patriarchy of one or two hundred years ago; what I deny is that this continuance – insofar as it really concerns the same thing – in itself constitutes an explanation.

Many people think that when they have found the point of origin of an institution in the past, they hold the key to its present existence. But they have, in fact, explained neither its present existence nor even its birth (its past appearance), for one must explain its existence at each and every moment by the context prevailing at that time; and its persistence today (if really is persistence) must be explained by the present context. Some so-called historical explanations are in fact ahistorical, precisely because they do not take account of the given conditions of each period. This is not History but mere dating. History is precious if it is well conducted, if each period is examined in the same way as the present period. A science of the past worthy of the name cannot be anything other than a series of synchronic analyses.

The search for origins is a caricature of this falsely historical procedures and is one of the reasons why I have denounced it, and why I shall continue to denounce it each and every time it surfaces – which is, alas, far too frequently. (The other reason why I denounce the search for origins is the use of its hidden naturalistic presuppositions.) But from the scientific point of view, it is as illegitimate to seek keys to the present situation in the nineteenth century as in the Stone Age.

Since 1970, then, I have been saying that patriarchy is the system of subordination of women to men in contemporary industrial societies, that this system has an economic base, and that this base is the domestic mode of production. It is hardly worth saying that these three ideas have and been, and remain, highly controversial.

Like all modes of production, the domestic mode of production is also a mode of circulation and consumption of goods. While it is difficult, at least at first sight, to identify in the capitalist mode of production the form of consumption that distinguishes the dominant from the dominated, since consumption is mediated by wage, things are very different in the domestic mode. Here consumption is of primary importance and has this power to serve as a basis for making discriminations, for one of the essential differences between the two modes of production is that domestic is not paid but rather maintained. In this mode, therefore, consumption is not separated from production, and the unequal sharing of goods is not mediated by money. Consumption in the family has to be studied if we want not only to be able to evaluate the quantitative exploitation of various members but also to understand what upkeep consists of and how it differs from a wage. Too many people today still "translate" upkeep into its monetary equivalent, as if a woman who receives a coat receives

the value of the coat. In so doing they abolish the crucial distinction between a wage and retribution in kind, produced by the presence or absence of a monetary transaction. This distinction creates the difference between self-selected and forced consumption and is independent of the value of the goods consumed.

Every mode of production is also a mode of circulation. The mode of circulation peculiar to the domestic mode of production is the transmission of patrimony, which is regulated in part by the rules of inheritance but is not limited to them. It is an area that has been fairly well-studied in some sectors of our society (e.g., farming) but completely ignored in others. Here we can also see, on the one hand, the difference between the abstract model and the concrete society and, on the other hand, the consequences of the fact that our social system (or more precisely the representation that has been made of it, i.e., the model of our social system) is composed of several subsystems.

The intergenerational circulation of goods is interesting in that it shows the mechanisms at work that produce complementary and antagonistic classes: the division between owners and nonowners of the means of production. The effect of the dispossession is clear in the agricultural world: those who do not inherit – women and younger siblings – work unpaid for their husbands and inheriting brothers. Domestic circulation (the rules of inheritance and succession) leads directly into patriarchal relations of production. But patrimonial transmission is equally important at another level in reconstituting, generation after generation, the capitalist mode of production. It not only creates possessors and nonpossessors within each family, but it also creates this division among families. This is the only aspect of patrimonial transmission that has really been studied to date. The former, the division into classes of a kin group, is passed over in silence by many sociologists and anthropologists, who pretend, against all the evidence and in particular against all the evidence on the division of society into genders-that all the children in a family inherit equally the goods and status of the head of the family. But being the only effect of patrimonial transmission recognized by (traditional) sociology makes its reconstituting of capitalist classes no less real, and this is, indeed, one of the times when the domestic mode of production meets the capitalist mode and where they interpenetrate.

Depriving women of the means of production is not the only way in which women are dispossessed of direct access to their means of subsistence, if only because many families do not have any family property not to transmit to them. The same effect is produced by the systemic discrimination women face in the wage-labor market (let us for the moment call it the “dual labor” market). This too pushes women to enter domestic relations of production, mainly by getting married. The situation of women on the labor market has been well-studied, and the only originality in my approach has been to invert the direction of the links usually established. While ordinarily it is seen as the family situation that influences the capacity of women to work outside, I have tried to show that it is the situation created for women on the labor market that constitutes an objective incentive to marry; hence, the labor market plays a role in the exploitation of women’s domestic work.

How should this fact be conceptualized? How should we interpret its meaning with regard to the relations between patriarchy and the domestic mode of production? Can we talk of capitalist mechanisms serving the domestic mode of production, or must we speak of domestic mechanisms at work in the labor market? Whatever the reply – and the question will stay open for a long time – one thing is clear: whether it concerns patrimonial transmission (which assists, if

not creates, relations of production other than those that are strictly domestic) or the capitalist labor market (which assists, if not creates, relations of production other than capitalist ones), the two systems are tightly linked and have a relationship of mutual aid and assistance. Moreover, the relations between patriarchy and the domestic mode of production are not simple relations of superposition. The domestic mode of production in places overruns patriarchy and in places is slighter. The same is true also of the capitalist mode of production: one of its institutions, the labor market, is in part ruled, or used, by patriarchy.

Thus, the domestic mode of production does not give a total account of even the economic dimension of women’s subordination. And it does not account for other dimensions of this subordination, in particular the oppressions that are just as material as economic exploitation, including all the varieties of sexual violence. Some of these forms of violence

can be attached to the appropriation of women's labor power. For example, C. Hennequin, E. deLesseps, and I attached them to the prohibition of abortion. Since the bringing up of children is labor extorted from women, it could in fact be thought that men fear women will seek to escape from the labor of child-rearing, notably by limiting births, and that men therefore accord themselves the means to withdraw such control from women by prohibiting abortion. The constraint to be heterosexual and the "choice" within sexuality of practices that result in impregnation can also be seen as a means to withdraw control over fertility from women and give it to men. The same sort of reasoning has been applied to marital violence and rape. However, to be fair, the links so established are too abridged to be called full explanations. There remain whole sections of women's oppression that are only very partially, if at all, explained by my theory. This can be seen as a shortcoming, but not an involuntary one; rather, it is a consequence of certain refusals and choices of a methodological kind which I have made.

I distrust theories that seek from the outset to explain as a totality all the aspects of the oppression of women. The first, general reason I distrust them is that such theories themselves remain particular. In being too glued to their object, to its specificity, they become specific, unable to locate their object among other similar things (e.g., among other oppressions), because they do not possess the tools to make it comparable. However, the explanatory power of a theory (or a concept or a hypothesis) is tied to its capacity to discover what is common to several phenomena of the same order, and hence to its capacity to go beyond the phenomenal reality (i.e., what is immediately present) of each case. The idea that the raison d'etre of things is to be found beyond their appearance, that it is "hidden," is part of scientific procedure (though it can, of course, be contested).

Thus, one of the objections that has been made to my use of the concepts "mode of production" and "class" has been that these concepts were created to describe other situations and that in using them I deny the specificity of our oppression. But analysis proceeds by a kind of logical "butchery." To understand a phenomenon, one begins by breaking it down into bits, which are later reassembled. Why? So that the bits will be the same for all instances of the phenomenon studied. (Here the phenomenon under study is the subordination of one group by another, the oppression of women being one instance.) The recompositions later obtained are then comparable. With a few concepts a geographer can describe any landscape. To understand is first to compare. This is how all sciences proceed, and it is how we proceed in everyday life: how you and I describe a person, a place, a situation to people who are not able to have direct experience of them.

But these nonspecific concepts are made not so much to describe things as to explain them. (Although all description requires a classification and hence at the start is an explanation, all explanation is also a description insofar as it can itself be further explained.) This is the ambition of analysis. The bits into which a phenomenon is broken are also not those of immediate perception. The economic dimension, for instance, is not an "obvious" category for thinking about the family today, but then it was also not an obvious one for thinking about any phenomenon whatsoever a few centuries ago even those our current language now calls "the economy."

It follows that when the bits are gathered together, the assemblages so obtained are in no way restitutions of the objects initially treated but rather models: images of what it is suggested are the realities underlying and causing the objects. The initial "objects" are also not themselves "pure" facts but rather the immediate perception of things, informed in a nonexplicit fashion by a certain view of the world (what Feyerabend referred to as "natural evidences"). Thus, it could be said, on the one hand, that the more a theory pretends to be "general" (its object), the more it has descriptive power and the less it has explanatory power; and, on the other hand, the more it is intended to account for immediate perception, precisely because to have a descriptive power it must stick to the "facts," the more it is ideological.

The other reason for my distrust of theories that wish to be "total" is that even when they do not aim to "cover" everything, they still aim to explain everything by a single "cause"; and when their concern is women's oppression, this thirst for a single cause generally leads straight into the arms of naturalism. Naturalism is a major sin of which we are not responsible since it is the indigenous theory – the rationalization – for oppression. Today it is applied to the oppression of women and people "of color," but it was also used to explain the oppression of the proletariat scarcely a century ago. It is not sufficiently recognized that the exploitation of the working class was justified, in the nineteenth century, by the "natural" (today one would say "genetic") inferiority of its members. And naturalism continues to infect our thought. This is most obvious in antifeminist thinking, but it is still present, in large measure, in feminism itself.

Feminists have been shouting for more than a decade whenever they hear it said that the subordination of

women is caused by the inferiority of our natural capacities. But, at the same time, the vast majority continue to think that "we must take account of biology." Why exactly? No one knows. Science has thrown out one after another, all the "biological explanations" of the oppression of proletarians and nonwhites, so it might be thought that this type of account would be discredited. This century has seen the collapse of such racist theories, even though one-quarter of primatologists keep trying to save them from annihilation. But the role that biology never merited historically it does not merit logically either. Why should we, in trying to explain the division of society into hierarchical groups attach ourselves to the anatomy of the individuals who compose, or are thought to compose, these groups? The pertinence of the question (not to speak of the pertinence of the replies furnished) still remains to be demonstrated as far as I am concerned.

Naturalist "explanations" always choose the most convenient biology of the moment. In the last century it was the (feeble) muscles of women; in the 1950s it was the (deleterious) influence of our hormones on our moods; today it is the (bad)

lateralization of our brains. Feminists are outraged by such "theories," but no one has yet explained to me how these theories differ fundamentally from the explanation in terms of women's ability to gestate which is so in favor today under the name of "reproduction."

One of the axioms, if not the fundamental axiom, of my approach is that women and men are social groups. I start from the incontestable fact that they are socially named, socially differentiated, and socially pertinent, and I question these social practices. How are they realized? What are they for? It may be (again, this remains to be proved) that women are (also) females and that men are (also) males, but it is women and men who interest me, not females and males. Even if one gives only minimal weight to the social construction of sexual difference, if one contents oneself with merely stating the pertinence of sex for society, then one is obliged to consider this pertinence as a social fact, which therefore requires an equally social explanation. (Just because Durkheim said it does not make this any less true.) This why an important part of my work is devoted to denouncing approaches that seek a natural explanation for a social fact, and why I want to dislodge all approaches that implicitly bear the stamp of this reductionism.

A considerable theoretical step forward was taken ten years ago with the creation of the concept of "gender." The term is, however, unfortunately little used in French and not systematically used in English, with the result that we continue to get entangled by the different meanings of the word "sex" or are constrained to use paraphrases (e.g., "sexual divisions in society"). The concept of gender carries in one word both a recognition of the social dimension of the "sexual" dichotomy and the need to treat it as such, and its consequent detachment from the anatomical-biological aspect of sex. But it only partially detaches the social from the anatomical. If gender identifies a social construction, it is, however, not arbitrarily built on no matter what: it is constituted by anatomical sex, just as the beret is set on the head of the legendary Frenchman. And, since its creation, the concept of gender, far from taking wing, has seemed always to function in composite expressions such as "sex and gender" or "sex/gender" – the "and" or the slash serving to buttress rather than separate the two. When two words are always associated, they become redundant; when, in addition, the association is not reciprocal – when sex can happily dispense with gender – the optional addition of the second term seems but a cautious form of speech that lacks real meaning.

The concept of gender has thus not taken off as I would have wished, nor has it given rise to the theoretical development it carried in germ. Rather, gender now seems to be taken at its most minimal connotation. It is accepted that the "roles" of the sexes vary according to the society, but it is this variability that is taken to sum up the social aspect of sex. Gender is a content of which sex is the constraining container. The content may vary from society to society, but the container itself does not. Gayle Rubin, for example, maintains that sex inevitably gives birth to gender. In other words, the sexual dimorphism of the human species contains in itself not only the capacity but also the necessity of a social division. The very existence of genders – of different social positions for men and women (or, more correctly, for females or males) – is thus taken as given, as not requiring explanation. Only the content of these positions and their (eventual, according to Rubin) hierarchy are a matter for investigation. Those who, like me, took gender seriously find themselves, today, pretty isolated.

I give above my reasons for mistrusting “specific” explanations. They may, perhaps, not totally explain for readers my use of the term “class.” Beyond responding to the needs of analysis as described above – though, perhaps, no better than another concept might (namely, breaking down an object – here the oppression of women – into small sections, or more precisely, into nonspecific dimensions) – the concept of class has the advantage of being the only one I know that at least partially responds to the strict requirements of a social explanation. It is perhaps not totally satisfying, but it is the least unsatisfying of all the terms used to analyze oppression.

The term “groups” says nothing about their mode of constitution. It can be thought that the groups – the dominant and the dominated – each have an origin that is sui generis; that having already come into existence, they later enter into a relationship; and that this relationship, at a still later time, becomes characterized by domination. The concept of class, however, inverts this scheme. It implies that each group cannot be considered separately from the other because they are bound together by a relationship of domination; nor can they even be considered together but independent of this relationship. Characterizing this relationship as one of economic exploitation, the concept of class additionally puts social domination at the heart of the explanation of hierarchy. The motives – the material profit in the wide sense – attributed to this domination can be discussed, and even challenged or changed, without changing the fundamental scheme.

Class is a dichotomous concept and thus has its limitations. But we can also see how class applies to the exhaustive, hierarchical, and precisely dichotomous classifications that are internal to a given society, such as the classification into men or women (adult/child, white/nonwhite, etc.). The concept of class starts from the idea of social construction and specifies its implications. Groups are no longer sui generis, constituted before coming into relations with one another. On the contrary, it is their relationship that constitutes them as such. It is, therefore, a question of discovering the social practices, the social relations that, in constituting the division by gender, create the groups of gender (called “of sex”).

I put forward the hypothesis that the domestic relations of production constitute one such class relationship. But this relation does not account for the whole of the “gender” system, and it also concerns other categorizations (e.g., by age). I would put forward as another hypothesis that other systems of relationship constitutive of gender divisions also exist and these remain to be discovered. If we think of each of these systems as a circle, then gender division is the zone illuminated by the projection of these circles onto one another. Each system of relations, taken separately, is not specific, either of gender division or of another categorization.

But these systems of relations do combine in various ways, each of which is unique. According to this hypothesis, it is the particular combination of several systems of relationships, of which none is specific, that gives singularity to the division.

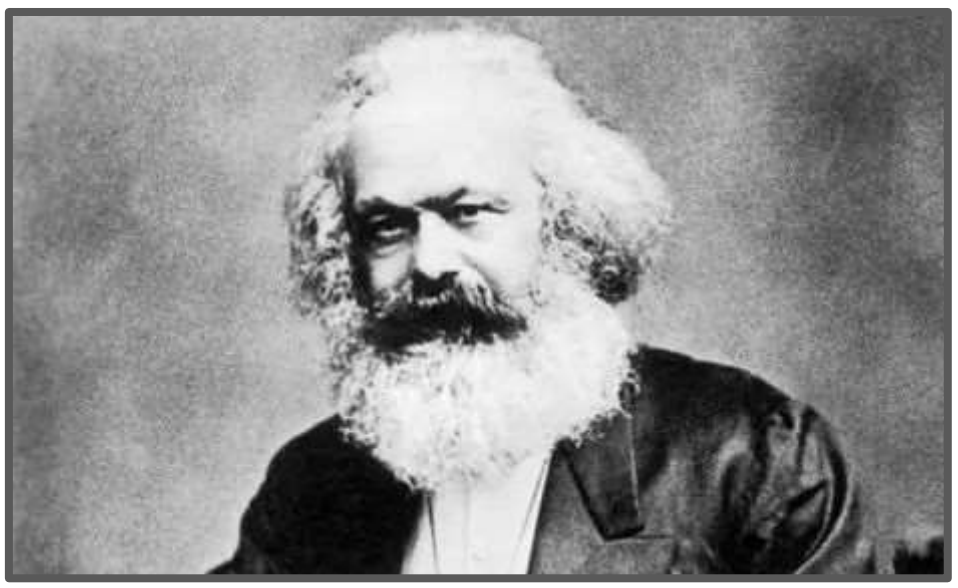
Is it the specificity of this combination that is meant when we say that patriarchy is a system? Or does this combination, in addition to being unique and noncontingent possess a meaning? And is it this meaning that makes patriarchy a system? Above all, what are the other systems that articulate with the domestic mode of production to form patriarchy? These some of the questions I think we must pursue.

Christine Delphy, 1988

Marxism and the Democratic Republic

The final point of Marxist Unity Group's Points of Unity calls for a democratic socialist republic in North America. For many Marxists today, this concept is unheard of and begs many questions. In this article I will jump around a bit while remaining connected to the red thread of this demand. First, I'll touch on why the demand for a democratic socialist republic isn't a part of contemporary left discourse. Next, I'll cover a bit of the history of Marx as a democratic republican and the goings-on within the 2nd International after his death.

After that, I'll focus on an influential take on Marxism and Republicanism found in William Clare Roberts' *Marx's Inferno*, in which Roberts presents Marx's conception of republican freedom as focused on non-domination. Finally, I will bring us up to the present – explaining why Marx's republicanism and the demand for a democratic socialist republic are important, and what that demand tasks the left with doing today. I've talked about this topic with folks from different backgrounds on the left, and they have different reactions to what I present. This is still a live question in my mind, and I am still working my mind around these ideas; in that way, this experience has been a bit like picking up a rock and watching so many small insects scatter in different directions.



History of a Demand

The demand for a democratic republic is certainly not in the vocabulary of the existing Communist, Maoist, or Trotskyist parties, nor is it a demand consistently championed by either the Democratic Socialists of America or authors published in the popular Jacobin Magazine (though a few articles about the subject have appeared). While Leon Trotsky referred to the democratic republic in his mid-1930s writings on France, the demand disappeared from Communist Party programs after the Russian Revolution. It remained submerged within a sea of Cold War discourse which split the world between Western 'democracies' on one side and various 'dictatorships' and 'totalitarian' powers on the other, with Marxism and the somewhat problematic 'Leninism' lumped in with the latter. Both the United States and the Soviet Union had an interest in portraying their respective political system as emblematic of democracy. Lost in all of this was what Marxism actually says about democracy, democratic republicanism, and what the state form of the dictatorship of the proletariat looks like – it wasn't the USSR.

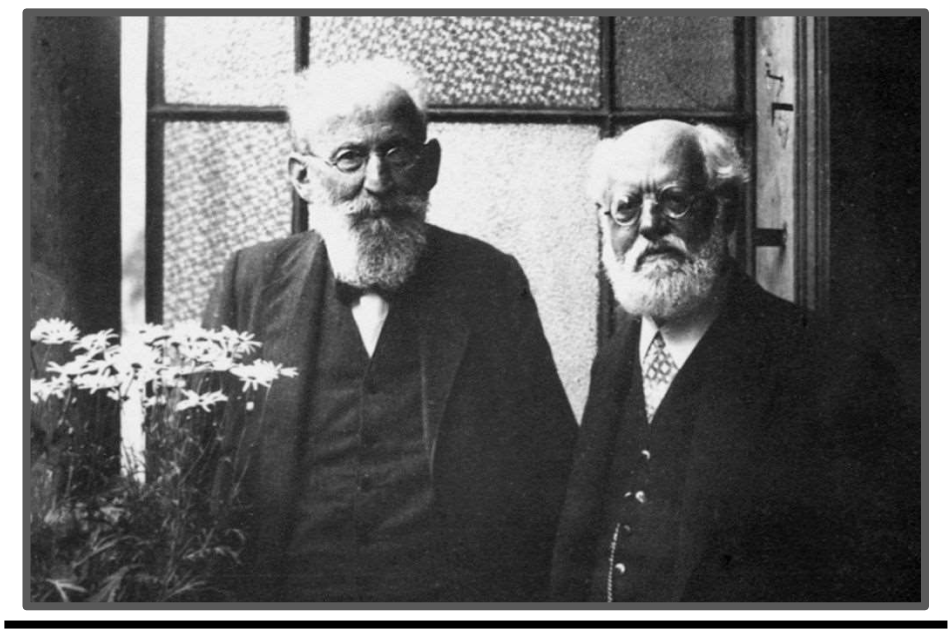
Today, when the left speaks of democracy, it's often in combination with the pejorative 'bourgeois' and scorned as such. Communism is seen as somehow better than or distinct from democracy; otherwise, democracy is seen as just a means to an end. Republicanism is similarly treated as "entirely reducible to petit bourgeois ideology that undermines the working-class struggle, [being] hence unworthy of serious study." As Bruno Leipold points out, the preeminent source of Marx's thought – the Die Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA) – refers to democratic republicans as "mere petty-bourgeois windbags." In their distaste for the existing rule of undemocratic Constitutional law and order that goes by the name of democracy, socialists have thrown the baby out with the bathwater.

It's as if everything Marx, Engels, and the Second International ever wrote about democracy, the democratic republic, and the state form of the dictatorship of the proletariat went out the window after the Russian Revolution. To a large extent, a particular reading of Lenin's The State and Revolution – one that focuses on references to the soviets and largely ignores what Marx said about the Paris Commune – became the definitive statement on what the workers' state would look like. The story goes: a true Marxist (who dreams of the workers taking state power) envisions workers'

councils, not a democratic republic; if you want a democratic republic, you want something called 'bourgeois democracy,' and aha! – you've revealed yourself as a reformist.

Another reason why much of the left rejects the idea of a democratic republic is that they misunderstand the task of the working class once it takes political power. Communism is not realized once the working class comes to power. Instead, the class struggle continues under capitalism, just at a higher level, with the working class controlling the state and therefore finally in a position to eliminate private property and commodity production. The revolution is a two-step process. Additionally, some sections of the left exemplify an economistic approach: they think only those demands which workers are already conscious of are appropriate to take up. If the workers aren't currently demanding the abolition of the standing army or the abolition of the senate, then neither should socialists. Finally, there are some leftists who consciously or unconsciously remain trapped in an insurrectionary mode of thinking, which I think is best exemplified in the idea that the working class could take state power now if only it had the correct leadership. I'm relatively confident that this comes from a particular interpretation of Trotsky: capitalism is rotten and as such is ripe for socialism; therefore, the fight for democracy is a distraction from the fight for socialism.

Today, one may not know that Karl Kautsky called democracy the "light and air" of the workers' movement, or that Rosa Luxemburg later exposed Kautsky as a renegade (before Lenin!) over the demand for a democratic republic in 1910. Friedrich Engels critiqued the German Social Democratic Party (SDP)'s Erfurt program for not demanding the democratic republic, and the 1912 program of the Socialist Party of America demanded the abolition of federal courts and the senate, the overturning of national laws only by a vote of the people, and a constitutional convention. "Such measures of relief as we may be able to force from capitalism," declared the SPA's program, "are but a preparation of the workers to seize the whole powers of government, in order that they may thereby lay hold of the whole system of socialized industry and thus come to their rightful inheritance." In 1892, Engels reiterated: "Marx and I, for forty years, repeated ad nauseam that for us the democratic republic is the only political form in which the struggle between the working class and the capitalist class can first be universalized and then culminate in the decisive victory of the proletariat." And what of Marx himself? His comments on the Paris Commune are the clearest evidence that he imagined working class political power taking the form of a democratic republic – and not the type of so-called "democratic republic" found in the United States and France at the time.



Only recently – due in part to a reexamination of Second International Marxism and challenges to the historiography of the official Communist parties and various Marxologists and Leninologists – is the centrality of democratic republicanism to Marxism reemerging. Still, the demand for a democratic republic is scarcely heard outside of a few individuals in the academy. The Communist Party USA, a century-old splinter from the SPA, advocates for democracy while leaving the U.S. Constitution intact. The Socialist Workers Party also defends the Constitution, claiming that it protects citizens from government abuse and enshrines rural Americans' right to representation in the Senate (this last point might have something to do with the SWP's fixation on a 'workers and farmers alliance'). Still, any interest in reevaluating the past and challenging existing myths is a promising development. Our task is to find what lies buried under layers of history, both actual and invented. Only by drawing the correct lessons from history can we improve our work in the present.

Labor Republicans in the United States

I now turn to the history of Marx's republicanism. Normally, I'd present this history through the lens of work by Bruno Leipold and Richard N. Hunt, who both emphasize the early 1840s and works such as the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, On the Jewish Question, and Critical Notes on the King of Prussia as examples of Marx's development from republicanism to a republican communist synthesis. Leipold uses the phrase "radical republicans" to describe republican thinkers who pushed for democracy at the political and social level, but who Marx eventually critiqued for not consistently encroaching on the rights of private property or insisting on the political independence of the working class. Instead, I view Marx's republicanism through the work of Alex Gourevitch and Sean Monahan, who discuss the influence of American Workers – labor republicans – on Marx and the earlier European socialists (who were very undemocratic compared to Marx).

Marx initially thought the French Revolution of 1789 had achieved something akin to human freedom by creating a democratic state. When Marx turned his attention toward the Americas in the 1840s, the United States was a constitutional republic with higher levels of suffrage than anywhere in Europe, and its president was a member of a political party with democracy in its name. But in reading descriptions of the United States by Alexis de Tocqueville, Thomas Hamilton, and Gustave de Beaumont, he quickly learned that political freedom doesn't equate to social freedom. A state can't be democratic, nor a people free, so long as property remains private rather than social.

Traditionally, Republicans had described freedom as the ability to control one's labor. But by the end of the 19th century, the condition of permanent wage labor had eliminated any semblance of control over the labor process. These worker-citizens of a nominal republic critiqued their country within the republican tradition. Reviewing what he terms the "labor republican" movement, Alex Gourevitch concludes:

> *The best chance republicanism had of transcending its aristocratic origins and of developing an egalitarian critique of enslavement and subjection was when someone other than society's dominant elite used republican language to articulate the concerns. This is precisely what happened when 19th-century artisans and wage laborers appropriated the inherited concepts of independence and virtue and applied them to labor relations. The attempt to universalize the language of republican liberty, and the conceptual innovations that took place in the process, were their contributions to this political tradition.*

These workers understood that the 'freedom' supposedly gained under the republic wasn't living up to its potential in the face of wage labor in which the worker sold away his body and mind for the majority of the day. Wage slavery was a popular term to describe the discrepancy between the idea of freedom and the reality of unfreedom, between appearance and substance. "For he, in all countries, is a slave, who must work more for another than that other must work for him," wrote Thomas Skidmore, founder of the Workingmen's Party of New York; "It does not matter how this state of things is brought about; whether the sword of victory hew down the liberty of the captive, and thus compel him to labor for his conqueror, or whether the sword of want extort our consent, as it were, to a voluntary slavery, through a denial to us of the materials of nature…" Knights of Labor leader and First International member Terence Powderly likewise explained how wage labor made "slaves of men who proudly, but thoughtlessly, boast of their freedom—that freedom which they claim came down to us from revolutionary sires as a heritage." Powderly wondered aloud, "…are we the free people that we imagine we are?" Finally, labor leader George McNeil described the American wage-laborer as someone who "assent[s]" but does not "consent," who "submits[s]' but does not "agree."

Contemporary scholars have presented various interpretations of Marx's early republican views and later commitment to communism. Richard Hunt explains that when Marx and Engels began their collaboration in 1845, both agreed that the institutions of government and decision-making in a classless society wouldn't be separate or estranged from the masses; there would be no division between state and civil society. Both young revolutionaries had a profound faith in the proletarian masses to use democracy to realize their interests, and that belief never wavered. Universal suffrage, freedom of the press, and freedom of association would lead to socialism. The trick was in getting those freedoms. Bruno Leipold contends that Marx questioned his initial republicanism after witnessing the bourgeoisie betray the revolutions of 1848 – when "the new French republic sent in the army to ruthlessly crush the insurgent workers who had naively believed that the republic would be theirs" – only to find a communist-republican synthesis after seeing the internal structure of the Paris Commune. In his interpretation of Das Kapital, William Clare Roberts calls Marx's republican-communist synthesis a marriage between the "concern for freedom" and a "systematic dissection of capital." More recently, Gil Schaeffer has traced the republican thread (though perhaps a thick rope would be a more appropriate analogy) throughout Marx's life, writing:

> *Of the three sources and component parts of Marxism, English political economy, German philosophy, and French revolutionary republicanism and socialism, Marx and Engels critique and modified all three save for the democratic republic, retaining its principles unchanged from its origin in the French Revolution as the state form of the dictatorship of the proletariat.*

At no point did Marx or Engels renounce their commitment to the political rule of the working class as the first step toward winning the class struggle and realizing a classless society. At no point did Marx or Engels renounce democracy – the political expression of

SOLIDARITY OF LABOUR
PRODUCTION FOR USE NOT FOR PROFIT
NO CHILD-TOILERS
THE PLOUGH IS A BETTER BACK-BONE THAN THE FACTORY
NO PEOPLE CAN BE FREE WHILE DEPENDENT FOR THEIR BREAD
COOPERATION & EMULATION NOT COMPETITION
SHORTER WORKING-DAY & LENGTHEN LIFE
ENGLAND SHOULD FEED HER OWN PEOPLE
THE LAND FOR THE PEOPLE
MERRIE ENGLAND

· A · GARLAND · FOR · MAY · DAY · 1895 ·

· DEDICATED · TO · THE · WORKERS · BY · WALTER · CRANE ·

the majority in the interests of the majority – as how the working class would come to power. Whether or not the ruling class would push back against that expansion of democracy with violence, and whether or not that reaction would necessitate a violent revolution, was another matter. "The first, fundamental condition for the introduction of community of property is the political liberation of the proletariat through a democratic constitution," stated Engels in 1847. One year later in their Manifesto the Communist Party, Marx and Engels declared that "the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class, to win the battle of democracy."

The Second International and Republican Superstitions

The French Third Republic was declared in September 1870. Karl Kautsky detailed the numerous ways the Republic was far less democratic than the previous empire of Charles-Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte. The critique from the German Social Democratic Party (SPD)'s leading theorist was so biting that he was compelled to write a lengthy piece explaining why the SPD wasn't secretly monarchist. Despite its name, Kautsky explained, the French Third Republic was just what Engels had called it years before: a monarchy with a president at its head. The modern state, to use a phrase from the pre-communist Marx of 1840, had replaced the monarch with the rule of the people only in a formal – not substantive – manner.

With the republic as its sacred banner, the bourgeoisie succeeded in winning over large sections of the French working class and some socialists like Alexandre Millerand by trumpeting the sanctity of its supposed 'democracy' against the alleged threat of a monarchical and clerical reaction. The bourgeoisie explained Jeffrey Isaac in a seminal work on Marx's Republicanism, donned the "lion's skin" of republican language to hide its eminently undemocratic nature. The trick was effective: "The word [republic] has a magical effect on the mind of the worker. This fata morgana fills them with hope," wrote a historian of the time, quoted by Kautsky.

Even in the United States, where the struggle between worker and employer had reached a fever pitch by the end of the century, the working class eventually fell under the sway of "republican superstitions." Kautsky stated: "The American worker still believes that thanks to his democracy he is better than workers living under monarchies and that he has no need for socialism, a mere product of European despotism...The main task of our American comrades...[is] to make the worker see reason...[that] just like in a monarchy, democracy has become a tool of class rule, that democracy can only again become a tool to break this class rule when he has overcome its republican superstitions." The American working class forgot their predecessors' understanding of the difference between form and content. The meaning of democratic republicanism needed rescuing from its bourgeois usurpers. That said, Kautsky's authority on who is or is not under the sway of "republican superstitions" is contested. I think it's a little too easy (and therefore very enticing) to point to a group of people and say that they don't understand the undemocratic nature of the state.

Almost a decade before Kautsky's criticism of the French Republic, Engels critiqued the SPD's 1891 Erfurt program for its failure to demand a democratic republic and appreciate the significance of its (albeit necessary) omission from party literature. "If one thing is certain," Engels wrote, "it is that our party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic." The Russian Social Democratic Party did what the Germans couldn't (or wouldn't) in putting the demand for a democratic republic in their 1903 party program, and Lenin polemicized against members of his party because they called themselves social democrats but weren't championing the political movement for a democratic republic against the Tsar. "If you were willing to fight for political freedom," explains Lars Lih, "you were Lenin's ally, even if you were hostile to socialism. If you downgraded the goal of political freedom in any way, you were Lenin's foe, even if you were a committed socialist." Famously, Kautsky became Lenin's foe after 1914. But the one-time Pope of Marxism ultimately reneged on his social democratic duty to champion the republic several years earlier during the Prussian suffrage debate in 1910. He thought that it was possible to bring about working class political rule without breaking from the existing state. His reneging opened him up for a forceful retort from Rosa Luxemburg, who insisted on the orthodox social democratic position that the working class can only come to power through the democratic republic. She explained that:

> *By pushing forward the republican character of Social Democracy we win, above all, one more opportunity to illustrate in a palpable, popular fashion our principled opposition as a class party of the proletariat to the united camp of all bourgeois parties.*

Freedom from Domination

Having reviewed some of the history of democratic republicanism in the worker and social movement during and after Marx's time, I now present Marx's republicanism as an interest in eliminating all forces of arbitrary domination. An extension of Marx's republicanism was his identification of the democratic republic of the Paris Commune as the state form necessary to render the state subservient to society. Marx fought to realize freedom for humanity by eliminating all forms of arbitrary domination, the greatest source of all being the rule of capital. William Clare Roberts identifies three areas that this domination appears in capitalist society: "the political domination of the workers effected by the state, the objective domination or despotism to which workers are subjected in production, and the impersonal domination experienced by all commodity producers."

Marx understood communism as the struggle of the working class for self-determination and self-actualization, a struggle that would throw all of existing society into the air and free all of humanity from bonds of superstition and want. Workers strive for a voice in the decisions impacting their lives to fully engage in all the meaningful activities of life. With this desire in mind, it's a fundamental problem for someone with an eye for non-domination that capitalist society presents a vast array of uncontrollable and arbitrary obstacles. Like the sorcerer in Fantasia who enchants a broom only to have it sweep with abandon, the working class has no control over the society it reproduces each waking hour. Marx was less concerned with stopping bad things from happening than he was with society's ability to collectively (socially!) control its fate. The inner workings of society must be clear and comprehensible. Marx, for example, preferred direct taxation over indirect taxation because the former "prompts" the person to "control the governing powers" Life is tough, but it's one thing to error or suffer because of decisions one understands and has some control over, and another to error or suffer due to arbitrary forces taking place behind one's back.

Marx located the sources of domination in capitalist society not just in the actions of individual capitalists or politicians, but in the market as a whole – the aggregate of billions of isolated decisions. The purchase of commodities, the ability to sell one's labor power to buy necessities, the decision to hire or fire an employee – all of these events are determined not by personal preferences or individual proclivities, but by the logic of the market operating outside of any collective debate or deliberation.

The most obvious example of the market's impersonal domination is the necessity of finding a buyer for one's labor power or risk starvation. One may not want to work, but one must. William Clare Roberts provides another example of how the market overrides individual preferences: "When your favorite independent bookstore closes down in the face of competition from discount and Internet booksellers, you might moan about how good it was for your town to have such a place, and how unfortunate it is that the shop was not a profitable venture anymore. And yet you might also have done much of your own book buying on the Internet...In each of these cases, something (buying books from the local bookstore, having a unionized and local workforce, refraining from fracking) is not done, not because the agents involved don't think it is worth doing, but because they feel compelled to bow to economic imperatives. We can set aside the question of whether or not these particular judgments about what is worth doing are correct.

The bare-bones structure of the intuition is only that there may be some divergence between what is worth doing and what is economically advantageous, and that, when the two come into conflict, people might feel both compelled to follow the economic incentives, and regret forsaking their previous judgment about what is worthwhile."

Society is immensely unfree under capitalism because individuals cannot gather together in the service of collective decision-making and are instead at the whim of impersonal forces. Everyone – the workers who depend on the ups and downs of the market and must labor to survive; the capitalists who must squeeze surplus value out of their workforce and find the cheapest source of labor power – is dominated. Humans made this world, yet it appears as so much quicksilver in each individual's hands. The task of communism is to take back the world we have created by giving the masses democratic control over society. The overarching obstacle standing in the way of this goal is the bureaucratic, undemocratic, alienated, bourgeois state.

Roberts writes that "so long as exchange constitutes the social nexus, producers will be dominated by market forces, workers will suffer overwork and despotism in their work, and masses will be excluded from access to the means of subsistence." Yet, the market isn't a God and the events shaping our lives aren't supernatural. Marx explained:

> *If the product of labor does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, then this can only be because it belongs to some other man than the worker. If the worker's activity is a torment to him, to another it must give satisfaction and pleasure. Not the gods, not nature, but only man can be this alien power over man.*

Human relations define capitalist society, and human relations are a matter of politics. That Marx was, in addition to everything else, a political thinker interested in political projects and political struggles can't be overstated. He recognized domination as surmountable only through a political project injecting democracy into all spheres of human activity and thereby beginning the process of moving towards the complete elimination of private property and a new realm of human relations. It's in the deepening of democracy – the willingness to touch private property and collectivize the means of production – where Marx takes hold of traditional republicanism as non-domination and stretches it like a rubber band.

The Democratic Republic as a Political Solution

Marx was eminently aware that individuals under capitalism are unfree in the sense of being endlessly subjected to arbitrary domination. The political solution to the freedom problem appeared to Marx in the self-activity of the Parisian working class during two months in 1871: the events of the Paris Commune and the creation of a democratic republic in miniature.

During an all-too-brief two months, the Communards made crucial changes to the state: universal (male) suffrage was enacted across Paris; officials were to be revocable and accountable to their constituency; the executive and legislative branches were combined, turning the commune into a "working, not a parliamentary body"; the standing army was replaced with a citizens' militia; all records of the Commune's internal activities were publicized; the police were to be under the control of the commune and subject to recall; all judges were to be elected and likewise subject to recall; and finally: every city, village, and town would model the commune with representatives from those communes sent to make decisions in higher bodies. Decision-making would be as local as possible while retaining a degree of centralization.

The state was made subordinate to society, democratic rights extended into the workplace, and the division between political and social existence was made a political project. The Communards worked under unfavorable circumstances; their revolt was isolated and lacked an organized party and clear theoretical direction. While they planned (and in some cases carried out) inroads into the arbitrary domination of the existing states, they didn't move against the domination of the commodity market. The personal (direct) domination of the bureaucrat over the citizen and the employer over the worker was reduced, but the impersonal (indirect) domination of the market over everyone remained.

The fact that the Communards didn't eliminate capitalism isn't a mark against them. As I've already explained, the revolution is a two-stage process: political and then social. Marx described this process best when he called the Commune "...the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labor"; it "supplied the Republic with the basis of really democratic institutions." Kautsky stated: "only when the French state is transformed along the lines of the constitution of the First Republic and the [Paris] Commune that it can become that form of the republic, that form of government, for which the French proletariat has been working [and] fighting..." Lenin, in a piece written to recover orthodox Marxism, offered a provocative take on the transformative power of democracy within the democratic republic. "The [Paris] Commune ... appears to have replaced the smashed state machine 'only' by fuller democracy: abolition of the standing army; all officials to be elected and subject to recall. But this 'only' signifies a gigantic replacement of certain institutions by other institutions of a fundamentally different type. This is exactly a case of 'quantity transforming into quality': democracy, introduced as fully and consistently as is at all conceivable, is transformed from bourgeois into proletarian democracy, from the state (a special force for the suppression of a particular class) into something which is no longer the state proper." The purpose of the transitional workers' state, understood by Lenin, is to run society and hold the bureaucrats accountable by subordinating them to the masses.

But we shouldn't let the grandeur of the Commune distract us from the fact that Marx was a champion of the democratic republic before 1871. His 'Demands of the Communist Party of Germany' – which called for a united German republic and the universal arming of the people – prefigured the Paris Commune by almost a quarter-century. Even earlier, Marx scrutinized supposedly democratic constitutions and made detailed lists pointing out their undemocratic provisions. Marx

didn't need the Paris Commune to make him a champion of democracy and an opponent of human bondage in all its personal and impersonal manifestations: whether iron shackles, undemocratic constitutions, or the domination of the market. The Paris Commune did provide Marx with a greater appreciation for the speed with which the workers would have to subordinate the armed forces of the state to popular control and deprofessionalize the state bureaucracy.

Tasks for Today

The socialist party embarks on its journey with the immediate goal – the democratic republic – detailed in its minimum program. The party's final goals – communism and freedom – are detailed in the maximum program. The fight to achieve the minimum demands strengthens the working class while making inroads against existing states – such demands as: a single legislative assembly elected by proportional representation; the abolition of the independent presidency and the Supreme Court's right of judicial review; the election of judges and other state officials; the expansion of jury trials and state-funded legal services; the unrestricted right of free speech; the abolition of copyright laws and monopolies of knowledge; the immediate dissemination of all state secrets; the abolition of police and standing army in favor of a people's militia characterized by universal training and service, with democratic rights for its members; and the immediate convening of a constitutional convention based on universal suffrage. Fully enacted, these demands smash the existing state. The democratic republic, because it is connected to society, remains subordinate to the masses during the transition to communism. With the state subordinate, democracy would begin to penetrate all aspects of political and social life. Having obtained freedom from the domination of the rule of the capitalist state, society could work toward the freedom to self-actualize.

Many of the party's minimum demands also appear in its internal organization. Leadership positions are decided based on one person, one vote – not by slate. The party minority has the right to become a majority through debate, the formation of factions, and the publication of opinions. Electeds are accountable to the membership, mandated to serve as tribunes of the people in the political arena, and recallable by a majority vote. Finances and minutes are documented and accessible. Members have the right and duty to express their ideas, especially when they conflict with those of the majority. Ultimately, the party is strong because of its "unity in diversity" of opinions and ideas. Debate strengthens the party by exposing all ideas to the light of day and combining the intellectual power and experience of the entire class. A strong argument can be made that, on the other hand, bureaucratic centralism renders socialist parties inoperable beyond a certain size.

Organized around democratic republican lines, the socialist party can also engage in political spaces (parliaments, Congress, etc.) that would otherwise swallow up a non-partied do-gooder. As Kautsky noted, it's a strong party that allows for a principled engagement in politics, not the engagement in politics that makes for a strong party. The RSDLP lived up to this social democratic maxim by remaining in constant opposition to the Tsar (and for a democratic republic) during the Duma period of 1906 to 1917. Crucial sections of the SPD reneged on this maxim by succumbing to parliamentary cretinism, especially in prioritizing Reichstag elections over extra-parliamentary struggles for Prussian suffrage reform in 1910 and voting for war credits with the hope of winning favor after the First World War.

Finally, working within a democratically structured socialist party acclimates the masses to engage in politics, either directly as party representatives or indirectly by keeping officials accountable. This training in political life and the creation of democratic structures is necessary for the present if the future state is to be subservient to the people. The working class must learn to lead, manage, and account for all aspects of society – an eminently political project. The representatives of the party must learn to subordinate themselves to the will of the majority. Learning how to engage in disciplined and principled political bodies is one of the many ways the working class rids itself of the muck of ages. In dereliction of duty, the left all-too-frequently avoids the question of hierarchies and decision-making by dodging the issue entirely; a vague notion of "socialism from below," or what amounts to the complete rejection of politics, is no solution to the problem of accountable leadership and leads to less democracy. 'Socialism from below' was a prevalent slogan in the International Socialist Organisation (we even made t-shirts!) The slogan expresses a desire to create distance between 'our socialism' as the democratic rule of the working class, and the various bureaucratic regimes that ruled in the name of socialism during the 20th century. A friend once joked that given the state of the left, he wouldn't mind some 'socialism from above.' In hindsight, the fact we couldn't imagine a state structure in which leadership is held accountable – that the only alternatives seemed to be between a mass strike (unlikely) or rule by bureaucrats (not socialism) – is telling.

Conclusion

I'll return to the three realms of domination in capitalist society identified by Roberts: "the political domination of the workers effected by the state, the objective domination or despotism to which workers are subjected in production, and the impersonal domination experienced by all commodity producers." Where do we strike this three-headed hydra so that it stops growing new heads? The impersonal domination experienced by all producers won't end once the working class takes state power because capitalism will still exist. Exploring the commodity form is theoretically interesting, but it does not provide a way for socialists to engage the working class. The domination of the working class at the point of production will be a constant source of conflict – sometimes higher, sometimes lower – so long as classes exist. But focusing our attention on labor struggles to the detriment of political struggles – as some critique the Rank and File Strategy for doing – concealed the fact that the struggle of class against class is a political struggle.

Only one head remains: the political domination of the workers by the state. A massive shift takes place in the class struggle when the working class recognizes the government is a far worse enemy than their employer. At that point, the class moves one step closer to realizing its historic mission of liberating all of humanity because it moves one step closer to contesting state power. It's to this end that Marxist Unity Group reaffirms the DSA's statement that the USA is "no democracy at all." We emphasize that "in preparation for the Third American Revolution, to be a socialist in this country is to be an enemy of the US Constitution."

I'm not convinced, like I used to be, that simply saying the word "socialism" or responding to each grievance with "the problem is capitalism" is always the best approach, nor is it inherently the most "radical" thing to do. The root problem is capitalism, but starting at the root doesn't necessarily make pulling out the tree any easier (nor is it even possible to start at the root: you must dig). Demanding a democratic republic in the United States is very radical. Challenging the Constitution is semi-sacrilegious. I asked a friend why he thinks leftists are quicker to say 'socialism' than they are 'democracy' or 'democratic republic.' He responded that democracy is harder than socialism – it asks more of people, demands more engagement, and a greater understanding of how our incredibly convoluted political system functions (or doesn't function). Democracy is also hard in the sense that it challenges socialists to win the masses of people to our ideas. There are no shortcuts to lasting power. If our ideas are correct, then we should not be afraid to expose them to the scrutiny of others. Socialists believe their arguments about the necessity of socializing the economy and abolishing the commodity form will have majority support. Only at this point can we start taking the first steps toward communism.

Luke Pickerell, in Cosmonaut

On the Dictatorship of the Maids

Every Kitchen Maid must learn to Rule the State

In his essay collection *Capitalist Realism*, Mark Fisher takes a moment to muse over the reality television show *Supernanny*, in which professional nanny Jo Frost would intervene in families where parental authority had broken down to introduce more effective techniques of childrearing and reestablish household order. Fisher wonders if the show is symptomatic of a larger breakdown in the family unit under post-Cold War capitalism, in which the paternal superego has become ineffectual, and the introduction of an outside force is necessary to restore stability. Observing the individualized nature of Frost's endeavors, Fisher, with tongue in cheek, proposes that perhaps what is really needed is a Marxist Supernanny which would address this breakdown as a wider social problem rather than targeting one household at a time. Fisher's concept is humorous on its face, but there's something worth considering here, the concept that a transformation of familial relations is a necessary component of the transition out of capitalism. The recently passed Families Code in Cuba, instituted by popular referendum, gestures at this kind of transformation. In its new legal definition, a family is defined as any group of people who live and are bound together by a sense of love, with an emphasis on the equitable distribution of domestic labor regardless of gender. Familial bonds remain, and indeed are granted wider recognition, but the old structure of patriarchal family units, the root of labor exploitation, is challenged by the code's emphasis on this shared burden.

The adage of prostitution being the world's oldest profession is a distorted form of the truth that the oldest division of labor begins with the formation of the patriarchal family unit, in which the labor of reproduction, both the literal process and the broader category of caregiving, or reproductive labor, is imposed onto women by their fathers and husbands. Friedrich Engels directly touched upon this in his work *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, stating "[t]he first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male." Contrasted with primitive communism, where household management is a public matter, the institution of monogamous marriage transforms household management into a private labor separated from direct integration with social production.

Let us take a moment to be explicit as to what "reproductive labor" entails. In Marx's writings, such as his 1865 address to the First International, "Value Price and Profit," he discusses how a worker's wages must be sufficient such that they can "reproduce" their labor power. That is to say, the wages must be able to allow the typical worker, on average, to afford the necessities of life, such as food, clothing, medicine, a dwelling, and the means to raise children who can eventually replace the worker as a source of labor power. However, the reproduction of labor is then not spontaneously achieved with the wages itself or the commodities that they can afford. Labor is now required for this reproduction to be carried out such as cooking meals, cleaning the living space, and caring for children and otherwise incapacitated members of the household.

By the time of the 19th century, the structure of the family in different societies had mutated and transformed many times over, but the fact remained that "[t]he modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife." We have made mention of "household management," as a sort of synonym of reproductive labor, the task entailed by this "domestic slavery," and it would be remiss if we did not acknowledge that this is the literal meaning of the very term "economy." Every household is a microcosm of the planning and coordination inherent to economic activity, even under capitalism's chaos of the marketplace, and the on-the ground planners for these households, traditionally responsible for measuring and determining the household's needs and ensuring its maintenance and reproduction, have been women, as a result of their responsibility for the household's basic needs in cooking, cleaning, and childrearing. The imposition of these duties varies according to the household's wealth: proletarian women typically take on both the burden of the housewife's labor in addition to bringing in wages, while the wives of labor aristocracy have, in times of prosperity, sometimes been able to take on the role of the housewife as their sole labor. But, when disposable income is sufficient, and almost universally among the haute bourgeoisie, reproductive labor is "outsourced"

onto the domestic worker, a division of labor which is both gendered and racialized, being disproportionately women from the Global South. For the sake of brevity, we shall use the term “Maid” to encompass the variety of seemingly disparate forms which reproductive labor takes on.

For our purposes, the Maid is the archetypal representative of the domestic worker in the position’s manifold manifestations. The figure of the Maid stands for the “feminized” nature of the reproductive labor and service performed by growing numbers of workers in both the metropole and the neo-colonial periphery. The Maid is not inherently proletarian: the role has figured just as easily into slave and feudal relations and can exist as an independent artisan just as easily as a wage laborer. Even as the maid was transformed into a proletarian, a wage worker who has nothing to sell but her labor, she was for a time cut off from the sphere of “production.” The Proletarian Maid in her role as a personal domestic servant was an “unproductive” laborer not because she was personally idle, or her labor was not in of itself a commodity, but because this labor was not performed for the surplus

value it would provide the maid’s employer, and instead for its utility - or rather, for its reproductive value. To clarify, if a Maid is paid wages by a capitalist to provide their services to different customers, and in doing so the maid returns with more in payment than their wages, then they have generated surplus value of the capitalist: this is what has made their labor “productive,” even if it is effectively the same labor they would perform if they were the personal domestic servant of a single master.

The transformation of the Proletarian Maid’s work into “productive” labor has become increasingly common in the past century as services which have traditionally been part of the internal labor divisions of the patriarchal household, such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare, have increasingly become major sources of capital accumulation. This transformation of the Maid with the rise of the “services” sector brings reproductive labor back into direct engagement with the sphere of social production in commodity exchange. The Maid is no longer confined to a single home and the direct service of a single master, but instead is an instrument of capital accumulation integrated into the rest of the proletariat. Line cooks, baristas, housekeepers, handymen, yard workers, and countless other occupations fall within the section of the proletariat, those workers whose labor has both a “productive” and “reproductive” nature. This dual character makes the revolutionary potential of the Proletarian Maid particularly interesting: when the Maid’s labor is withheld in these cases, the reproduction of numerous households is put under pressure while it brings the reproduction of capital to a halt. The proletarianization of reproductive labor makes it ripe for organization where it once would have been effectively impossible. Reproductive labor is the foundation upon which all value is ultimately premised - productive labor cannot create value without reproductive labor ensuring that the former is even possible, and the purpose of the wages has always been to ensure this reproduction is possible.

Unlike manufacturing, which is often localized to specific regions and concentrated overwhelmingly in the Global South, the Maid’s industries are pervasive in almost every part of the world, spread across every region. Reproductive labor necessarily entails at least some proximity to the households being reproduced: there is no way to outsource housecleaning to a third world immigrant without bringing them to the first world. This physical presence within the Global North and its necessity makes the reproductive laborer more difficult to uproot as a source of domestic labor disruption through offshoring - should they ever become organized to the same extent as the manufacturing sector once was. Logistics and reproductive services are two of the current major battlegrounds of the labor struggle in North America, each facing distinct challenges but united by the necessity of relative proximity which entails a resistance to displacement abroad, advantages which each can capitalize on. The Proletarian Maid has started to realize the power in her hands and is beginning to use it as leverage against her masters - the next step is for the maids of the world, already organizing and gaining militance, to become aware of their destiny and role as cornerstone of the polity and begin preparing to take this place.

So, if radical organized labor in industries of the Maid is a potential menace, then surely the natural response for capital is to prioritize the automation of such labor (rather than letting gradual advancements in production slowly approach this goal)? It’s certainly not inconceivable that such technologies which make labor inputs in proletarianized reproductive labor minimal could be rolled

out within the next few decades if prompted by the threat of militancy among such workers. But the development of productive capabilities under capitalism is always a double-edged sword and creates the kind of disruptions which militant organizations can take advantage of. With so much labor concentrated in matters of reproduction, to try and automate it all at once would have disastrous economic consequences, both massive unemployment and a fall in wages for those who remain employed and already are among the least well-compensated parts of the labor force. If the Maids can organize themselves into a militant organization, binding themselves to the rest of the working masses and armed with a dedication to overturning the established order, then plunging the world into economic crisis will only spur on their rise to power.

Beyond the leverage which the Maid has in the world economy, there is another reason for their position as leaders in this struggle. Historically, the excellence obtained by the upper classes has relied upon the foundation of the work of these domestic workers: the freedom and vitality of the scions of wealth has depended upon the tutors, cooks, cleaners, and nannies whose labor nourishes and cultivates them. In this sense the Maid is the true aristocrat, the administrator of surplus who instills all that could ever potentially be virtuous into the empty shells of the gentry and bourgeoisie. A desirable social order, one that cultivates universal virtue and attends to individual and collective needs, requires a universal administration by the Maids. In that the nature of the role is both servant and administrator, the Maid is the ideal form of leader and the means by which leadership is reproduced. The ideal order is one in which everyone is both instilled with excellence by the Dictatorship of the Maids and elevated to maidhood so that they might impart that same excellence to others.

This socialization of the Maid's reproductive labor is what constitutes the core of the abolition of the discreet family unit, long established as one of the objectives of the communist movement. Engels states this explicitly in The Principles of Communism:

What will be the influence of communist society on the family? It will transform the relations between the sexes into a purely private matter which concerns only the persons involved and into which society has no occasion to intervene. It can do this since it does away with private property and educates children on a communal basis, and in this way removes the two bases of traditional marriage – the dependence rooted in private property, of the women on the man, and of the children on the parents.

As we discussed at the beginning, steps like the Families Code in Cuba move towards this vision of the family in communist society, emphasizing the relationship of adults to children as one of responsibility to the vulnerable and the equal sharing of domestic labor over its old division between the sexes. This is the rudimentary form of what becomes the Dictatorship of the Maid, where the labor of reproduction is brought back into the public sphere. Under such an order, everyone capable should be a Maid, working in tandem to provide those basic forms of housework for each other and all those who cannot care for themselves. In the long term, the aim is to eliminate the subject-object distinctions of care as extensively as possible, a social order in which self-sufficiency and interdependence are effectively indistinguishable. The Dictatorship of the Maids begets universal maidhood, and with universal maidhood the dichotomy of "maid" and "master" collapses.

Comrade E.

On the Women's Question

A resolution by the RCO Central Committee

1. In every society today there persists a patriarchal kernel to social life. Patriarchy, being a social system in which women are systematically exploited and oppressed by men, has served as the organisational substrate for social reproduction and domestic exploitation for millennia. It is only in modernity that this social form has been systematically and cogently challenged: both by the development of commodity society, and by the movements for the liberation of women.

2. Patriarchal society is characterised chiefly by a social division of labour which saddles women with the work of social reproduction: performing a host of domestic, child rearing, and sexual labour which is exploited by men and reinforces the entire social order. This exploitation is mediated by all manner of social institutions: the family being the first amongst them, but also the community, the church, the sex and service industries, industrial and agricultural capital, and the state itself. It is from this central exploitative relation that all manner of social horrors blossom: rape, domestic violence, the trafficking in women and girls, forced pregnancy, mistreatment of children, and a sexual hegemony of the ruling class.

3. Patriarchal society is a form of class society, a form of class society which has developed in combination with various modes of production. Communists are opposed to all forms of exploitation, be they serfdom, slavery, wage labour, or domestic servitude.

4. The development of capitalism has seen the reorganisation of patriarchy through the generalisation of the nuclear family as the primary institution of social reproduction. The demands of the market economy for individual consumptive units, and the intensified need to reproduce labour power to meet the demands of the market has atomised, alienated, and isolated women. At the same time, the demand for labour has drawn women into the workforce, stripping them of communal and religious ties and throwing them at the service of capital as free proletarians. This combined and uneven liquidation of the patriarchal community has laid the foundations of women's liberation.

5. The advent of capitalist modernity has both intensified the oppression and exploitation of women, and laid the foundations for women's liberation. This has led to the development of a women's movement, which has drawn women from all social strata into the struggle to overturn patriarchal oppression. This movement was in turn combined and uneven, internally stratified by social class. The political manifestation of this movement, feminism, was plagued by the same divisions expressed at the level of theory.

6. In the wake of the Second World War, the workers movement in the core imperialist states was systematically integrated into the Keynesian-Social Democratic-Laborist mode of regulation. This mode of regulation, which coincided with the generalisation of the Fordist mode of accumulation, was based in part upon the stabilisation of social reproduction through the generalisation of the nuclear family amongst the working class. A patriarchal-chauvinist compromise predominated the workers movement: a compromise that was overthrown by a wave of social struggles beginning in the 1960s.

7. The destabilisation of the post-war mode of regulation, and the emergence of Neoliberalism as a mode for the regulation of capitalist society, was in part based on a massive reorganisation of social reproduction. Women were drawn into the workforce in vast numbers, with the growth in childcare, domestic services, and sex work offsetting the destabilisation of the family as the chief unit of reproduction. This reorganisation has seen the institutionalisation of a bourgeois, liberal wing of the women's movement. This wing, which has historically represented women of the bourgeois class - seeks equality for their social strata within the broader system of capitalist patriarchy. The ascent of these women into the ranks of capitalists is based upon an intensification of exploitation, mainly of women workers both in the core and in the global periphery.

8. At the same time, sections of the women's movement have retreated into obscurity. Some have become little more than a reactionary cult of womanhood, insisting upon an essential female identity which is the basis for their politics. Others have become little more than appendages of the bourgeois academy, churning out safe ideological fancies in the form of academic feminist

discourses.

9. With the integration of liberal feminism into the state apparatus and its internalisation by bourgeois society generally, communists must today play a central role in arguing for an approach to women's liberation based on explicit class politics. Communists must hold to a revolutionary feminist line in both the women's movement and in the workers movement, reject all forms of chauvinism and opportunism, and expound the fundamental orientation of the communists: the formation of a revolutionary party, the generalisation of class struggle, the formation of a communist women's movement, and the establishment of a feminist dictatorship over capital and patriarchy.

10. Male chauvinism permeates the working class. This is a reflection of the real, material benefits patriarchy awards working men, however undermined these benefits are by the accelerationist tendency of capitalist development. However, it is also true that working class men have a real, material interest in the overthrow of capitalist patriarchy and the establishment of a communist society. It is the task of revolutionary organisation and class struggle to relentlessly struggle against male chauvinism, and to win working men to a feminist program of social revolution. Not a single inch can be given to male chauvinism.

11. The division of the women's movement, the general defeat of the class and its institutions, and the weakening of the communist left during the contemporary reactionary period has allowed for the proliferation of many forms of political defeatism: be they separatist, lifestylist, or liberal-moralist in nature. While these tendencies must be combatted, they are symptomatic of a generalised decline, and their adherents amongst the feminist camp will likely be won to a revolutionary feminist program when it is given reality by class struggle.

12. Communism is the material basis for the liberation of women. Only communism can socialise social reproduction and organise it on the basis of general need and the emancipation of labour. Only communism can institute the dictatorship of working women, which in fact is a feminist, communist dictatorship over reactionary patriarchal society and the patriarchal family. Only communism can end the generalised exploitation of labour, systematic exploitation and degradation of working women, and the general immiseration of the proletariat.

13. The task ahead for communist feminists is the organisation of a proletarian front in the women's movement, and the agitation for a feminist program amongst workers more broadly. The women's movement must be put on a fighting basis, with serious organisations and revolutionary demands. This development must go hand-in-hand with the reconstitution of a genuine communist mass party, a party that must have revolutionary communist feminism as its political basis.

Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Organization (RCO)

WOMEN HOLD UP HALF THE SKY

For Freedom

Upcoming Events

Talking Reds
A Socialist Discussion Group
The Burrow, West End
Brisbane
First Saturday of the Month, 2pm

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